Built with Empty Fists: The Rise and Circulation of Black Power Martial Artistry during the Cold War

by

Maryam K. Aziz

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Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Matthew J. Countryman, Chair
Associate Professor Victor Román Mendoza
Associate Professor Sherie M. Randolph, Georgia Tech University
Associate Professor Stephen Ward

Maryam K. Aziz

maryamka@umich.edu

ORCID iD: 0000-0002-2006-4285

DEDICATION

To my Nana, Dr. Winfred Barbee, who passed away just as I finished prelims and defended my prospectus. Thank you for helping to raise me, for all the years of laughter, rigor, and Black culture, and for being the first person to see me submit this dissertation, perched from your hallowed place atop my desk.

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#SayHerName

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOMAP	All Open Marital Arts Program
BAM	Black Arts Movement
BCD	Black Community Defense and Development
BJJ	*Black Belt Jones*
BKF	Black Karate Federation
BPP	The Black Panther Party
CAP	Congress of African People
CIBI	Council of Independent Black Institutions
COINTELPRO	Counterintelligence Program
CFUN	Committee for a Unified Newark
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FOI	Fruit of Islam
LBIKC	Long Beach International Karate Championship
MGT	Muslim Girl Training
NOI	Nation of Islam
OCLC	Oakland Community Learning Center
OCS	Oakland Community School
UNIA	United Negro Improvement Association
TBP	*The Black Panther*
TWWA	Third World Women's Alliance
YTT	*Yesterday…Today and Tomorrow*

ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores the history of unarmed self-defense and martial arts in Black community organizing between 1955 and 1980. As such, it intervenes in Black Power studies, Afro-Asian studies, and gender history. Using a Black feminist approach to social movement analysis, it challenges preconceived notions about Black Power athleticism, aesthetics, gender roles, and self-defense. Utilizing oral histories and archival research, my dissertation alters current understandings of Black martial artistry. This study disproves the narrative that 1970s kung fu films sparked African American interest in martial artistry, and from there trickled into Black Power organizations. It analyzes how U.S. Cold War occupation of Okinawa and similar locales across East Asia facilitated the study of arts like karate by creating possibilities for interracial contact, both domestically and abroad. While the roots of African-American practices of East Asian martial artistry can be traced to U.S. militarism, I argue that martial arts practice contributed to the development of holistic, community engagement practices rooted in political, spiritual, and physical well-being within Black communities.

I explore martial arts practice in three organizational case studies in order to attend to differences in time-period, approach, and gender practices. Nationwide, the Nation of Islam empowered men and women to feel safe with gendered ideas about who should practice unarmed, community defense. The Congress of African People practiced karate to provide physical protection to black community leaders and politicians running for elected office and enrich Pan-Africanism and Black Arts cultural practice in New York and New Jersey. Lastly, the

Black Panther Party taught tae kwon do as part of a Third World, gender-inclusive education, catering to the body and soul of Oakland youth. The dissertation ends by examining how these organizations influenced the representations of male and female martial artists in Blaxploitation films. My intersectional lens centers a critical approach to Black nationalist masculinism and situates how developments in Black women's leadership impact the gender norms and pedagogy of combat sports and self-defense. It revises assumptions that Black manhood and womanhood remained static and that Black Power activists did not develop nuanced approaches to body politics and self-determination.

INTRODUCTION

I. Research Questions and Argumentation

This dissertation examines the relationship between martial arts, U.S. militarism, and the concept of Black Power, as it was practiced by community organizers in the Urban North and West, between 1955 and 1980. It demonstrates that the spread of Black Power martial arts practice during this period was not primarily the result of kung fu films. It was facilitated by the U.S.'s presence in East and Southeast Asia over the course of the 20th century, particularly during the Cold War. Using a Black feminist, historical analysis and a critical approach to U.S. militarism, the project shows that the U.S. occupation in the Pacific allowed activists to study arts like karate by creating interracial contact overseas and stateside. I argue that participation in and reaction to the U.S.'s military engagements created space for Black practitioners to incorporate martial arts into holistic, community engagement strategies. While its roots can be traced to U.S. militarism, I further argue that these practices emerged from practitioners' commitment to improving Black political, spiritual, and physical well-being. Lastly, I contend that analyzing Black Power organizers' martial arts practices reimagines how they positioned gender ideology and gender roles in their activism.

I arrived at this topic through the deep contrast between my family history and the representation of Black martial artistry that I encountered in the academy. As a child, my father talked about his experiences with activism, anti-colonialism, and Black radical thought. More extensively, he recalled how he proudly practiced martial arts while he participated in

community organizing. Later, I wondered why his most vivid memories of community engagement existed inside of a *dojo*.[1] Moreover, his memories did not align with popular narratives about Black martial arts practice: that Black "fascination" with martial arts was accelerated by youth who watched Bruce Lee and Jim Kelly's anti-imperial performances in the 1972 film, *Enter the Dragon*. My father's instructor learned martial arts long before Bruce Lee captivated film audiences. Named Moses Powell, he performed at the World's Fair in New York in 1965, the same year that an unknown Lee first appeared in martial arts tournaments on the West Coast. Perplexed by the incongruences between lived history and the history of martial arts in African American studies and Afro-Asian studies, I was eventually led to these questions:

- How does the history of Black Power martial art shift when we decenter 1970s kung fu films?
- How does studying the first 20 years of the Cold War period change how we understand African American interest in martial arts? How does it nuance the relationship between Black Power, U.S. militarism, and Empire?
- And finally, what does historicizing martial art practice do to our understandings of the holistic nature of Black Power organizing?

By answering these questions, my research moves scholarship from defining Black martial artistry as a cultural byproduct of film to positioning it instead as a form of Black Power that undermined White Supremacy through expressive and physical culture. The limitation of many analyses in the field is their hyper-focus on films and deprioritization of imperialist history and the work of Black martial artists whose practices were neither simply theoretical nor

[1] A dojo is a studio or space where martial arts are practiced. "Do" means "(the) way" and "jo" denotes "place." Hence, dojos are places where the ways of martial arts are taught.

performative. Although scholars like Vijay Prashad and Fred Ho have written about Black martial artistry, activism, and the U.S. military, no extensive research has been conducted to situate their relationship to each other.

As such, "Built with Our Empty Fists" contributes to 20th century History, African American Studies, and comparative ethnic studies in both critical and diverse ways. Firstly, my study is the first to highlight the centrality of martial arts to the Black Power and Civil Rights Eras. It is also one of a handful of studies to analyze smaller cities such as Camden, New Jersey in order to examine national trends in 20th century Black activism. Secondly, it theorizes how martial arts expand what scholars and non-scholars alike recognize as activism, athletics, and art. In the social sciences broadly, researchers have studied the utility of self-defense classes for improving confidence and safety for children, women, and marginalized communities in scholarship. In contrast, while African American historians have recognized the value of armed self-defense and cultural expression to African American History, my study is the first to highlight the significance of unarmed self-defense. In doing so, the project uses unarmed self-defense to blur the dichotomy that has been constructed between bodies that enact nonviolence and bodies that enact self-defense. Other historical studies explore the role of sports and health practices in building community. None contain significant discussion of combat sports beyond boxing. Moreover, few theorize the relationship between activism, Blackness, and corporeality. My martial arts research demonstrates why studying martial arts transforms our understanding of Black Power in conjunction with the research on Black organizing, dance, and yoga conducted by scholars like Mary Phillips and Jasmine E. Johnson.[2]

[2] See Mary Phillips, "The Feminist Leadership of Ericka Huggins in the Black Panther Party," *Black Diaspora Review* 4, no 1, (Winter 2014), 215; Mary Phillips, "New Approaches on Women's Narratives in the Black Panther Party," (lecture, Conversations in Black Freedom Studies: Women in the Black Panther Party, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,

Lastly, through a historical approach to physical culture and movement, this dissertation brings U.S. Empire studies into conversation with Black Power Studies and Black Internationalism. It disproves an assumption in Afro-Asian Studies that Bruce Lee and Jim Kelly's embodiment of anti-colonial solidarity and Third Worldism in the 1973's film, *Enter the Dragon*, popularized Black martial artistry and martial artistry in Black activism. In overlooking both the origins of martial arts practice, scholars have misunderstood the significance of Cold War Imperialism to the development of Black radical performing arts. In contrast, I identify martial arts practice as a hidden legacy of U.S. militarism and redirect scholarly attention to the practitioners who incorporated martial arts into African American struggles for self-determination.

Since the suggested relationship between Black culture, martial arts, and empowerment is often ahistorical, my scholarship studies the cultural and political significance of unarmed self-defense beyond entertainment. Though understudied, martial arts practice has historically constituted a political strategy and cultural expression that has afforded Black people opportunities to build networks of solidarity and community and advance racial and gender justice. Close historical readings of martial artistry revise our understanding of the Black Power Era and highlight the range of valuable tools activists used to create effective and immediate social and personal change.

New York, New York, March 3, 2016); and Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson, "Dancing Africa, Making Diaspora" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 43-46, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/1669918202?accountid=14667.

II. Literature Review

Until now, analyses of Black martial artistry have been centrally located within Afro-Asian Studies, the often-leftist intersection of African American and Asian American Studies. Scholars such as Fred Ho and Sundiata Cha-Jua have explored the aesthetic and performative meanings of martial arts in terms of Third World revolutionary expression. Though "Built with Our Empty Fists" suggests a different history of Black martial arts practice than these scholars, they are crucial interlocutors upon whose work I build. In *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting*, Vijay Prashad laid the groundwork for the field's theorizations of martial arts by utilizing Bruce Lee's body as a site of Third World, masculine liberation. The "beautiful acrobatics" Lee deploys onscreen in *Enter the Dragon* have particular resonance for Prashad.[3] In contrast to a figure like James Bond, an agent of the corrupt British imperial state, Lee's character kicked around the bourgeoisie as well as race traitors.[4] Lee's defeat of white supremacists and Asian elites represented the temper of the late 1960s, when many people of color stood vehemently against the US's violent military intervention in Vietnam. Citing Steve Muhammad and Muhammad Ali as examples of athletes who stressed cross-racial solidarity as an alternative to fighting the Viet Cong, Prashad links Muhammad and Ali to Bruce Lee because of how "with his bare fists and his nunchakus, Bruce provided young people with the sense that [they], like the Vietnamese guerrillas, could be victorious against the virulence of international capitalism."[5]

Connecting Lee's cinematics to Black film viewers spurred a subfield of texts that examined martial arts performativity in order to understand Afro-Asian interactions. Sundiata Cha-Jua emphatically wrote that "African Americans' interest in the martial arts began with a

[3] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001, 126.
[4] Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, 126-127.
[5] Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, 127.

fascination with kung fu films during the early 1970s."[6] Amy Abugo Oniri makes similar claims and also focuses on audience reception, remarking that "kung fu films…certainly populariz[ed] the study of martial arts with African American audiences."[7] In his essay "Kickin' the White Man's Ass: Black Power, Aesthetics, and the Asian Martial Arts," Fred Ho argues that *Enter the Dragon*'s martial performances scintillated Black audiences. He interpreted Bruce Lee and Jim Kelly's martial arts victories as the "'nonwhite' third world beating…the 'white' First World [in] a statement of anti-imperialist and nationalist pride."[8] According to Kim Hewitt, Lee and Kelly's anti-bourgeoisie martial arts encompass "a vivid, imagined physical participation," a vicarious performance for audiences of people of color.[9]

These anti-imperialist performances transitioned well into black cultural performativity. Hewitt argues that Black martial artists make use of "the cool," an aesthetic performed by jazz musicians like Dizzy Gillespie and by African dancers. The aesthetic promotes a "controlled presence… while staying relaxed and expressing a sense of 'inner spirit.'"[10] Using the same "cool," martial arts practice allows Black people to perform acts of defiance, even if they never use their arts against an oppressor or opponent. This is important because of how the Black body has "been denied the right to be freely expressive in public space as well as denied the power to defend" itself.[11] Because martial arts often do not require material equipment, Hewitt stressed

[6] Sundiata Cha-Jua, "Black Audiences, Blaxploitation and Kung Fu Films, and Challenges to White Celluloid Masculinity." In *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, edited Poshek Fu. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008.
[7] Amy Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2009), 39.
[8] Fred Ho, "Kickin' the White Man's Ass: Black Power, Aesthetics, and the Asian Marital Arts," in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York University, 2006), 297.
[9] Kim Hewitt, "Martial Arts Is Nothing if Not Cool: Speculations on the Intersection between Martial Arts and African American Expressive Culture," in *Afro Asia Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections between African Americans and Asian Americans*, ed. Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 270.
[10] Hewitt, "Martial Arts Is Nothing if Not Cool," 273.
[11] Hewitt, "Martial Arts Is Nothing if Not Cool," 266.

that, similar to break dancing, they can be perfected with "the sole resource always available-one's own body."[12]

Except Prashad, the aforementioned authors mostly forego archival research to hyper-focus on African Americans as audience members and consumers, largely ignoring how U.S. militarism informed martial artistry and solidarity. But the history is in plain view when one uses *Enter the Dragon* as an archival source rather than just as a cinematic text. This history is revealed when scholars look past the anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, AfroAsian impulses to find the submerged positionality of U.S. Empire. In the film, Jim Kelly's character, the charismatic Williams is treacherously killed when he refuses to join a global crime syndicate. Though he dies midway through the film, Kelly's character persists on in American popular culture. He represents the Black, masculine defiance associated with images of Black Power activists. No scene is more indicative of the character's relationship to Black pride and Black nationalism than the scene at 24:37, in which Kelly strolls into a Black martial arts school in South Central Los Angeles. In this scene, he shakes hands with fellow, real-world martial artist Steve Muhammad, discussed more below. As their characters converse, Muhammad and Kelly stand in front of a large, Black Power logo borrowed from Muhammad's school, the Black Karate Federation. In the background, a dozen young, Black men yell and throw their fists into the air in front of them, practicing Kenpo Karate punches in military formation.[13]

The assumed legacy of *Enter the Dragon* is that it produced the drive for a Black martial artistry. "Built with Our Empty Fists" breaks from the dominant narratives and argues that Jim Kelly's Black Power martial artist was not a trope contrived by the film industry's attempt to lure Black audiences. The irony of this interpretation is that the portrayal of Muhammad's school in

[12] Hewitt, "Martial Arts Is Nothing if Not Cool," 267.
[13] Robert Clouse, dir. *Enter the Dragon* (1973; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2004), DVD.

the movie acknowledges that the usual narrative is false. More than a cult icon, the Black Power martial artist is a historical product of both Cold War imperialism and the community development tradition in Black American communities. When Ho analyzes the scene, he centers on the "black nationalist flag of red, black, and green, set on the continent of Africa with a cobra emblem."[14] But the flag's Pro-Blackness hides Black martial arts' origins in U.S. military history. The polycultural "kung fu" of scholars like Vijay Prashad and Fred Ho decries the same empire that facilitated Black martial artistry's growth. Muhammad, a military veteran ideologically opposed to what he was deployed to execute in Vietnam, takes the martial arts he learns and, in turn, teaches it to students in the Los Angeles' Black communities.

Evidence like this reorients how we engage with martial arts as a scholarly project. Martial arts performance and practice in African American communities should be historicized rather than romanticized within the lived experience of U.S. empire. Analyses of these arts can cite Third World visions of shared emancipation while acknowledging that this Third World solidarity is the product of both cultural exchange and American cultural imperialism. I argue that the historical process that created marginalized peoples in occupied territories and appropriated their artistic practices helped to spread martial arts to marginalized others in the United States itself.

Furthermore, I argue that scholars not only need to contextualize this history to fully understand its implications and the stretch of U.S. militarism, but that scholars need to study how the displays of freedom performed by Jim Kelley's characters in *Enter the Dragon* and *Three the Hard Way* are more than just tropes. Both Ho and Prashad briefly discuss real martial artists like Steve Muhammad and Ron Van Clief, but they do not examine the differing ways in which

[14] Ho, "Kickin' the White Man's Ass," 296.

martial arts instructors became radicalized and developed liberation frameworks for their community work. My dissertation explores the function of East Asian martial arts within the Black Power Movement, whether they were used in conjunction to racial uplift, cultural politics, or radical, leftist opposition to the state. Further, it calls attention to the ways in which we have overlooked how martial arts instruction acted as a segue into community organizing and institution building for black veterans or Black students of veterans. Bridging the gap between the popular story of Black American martial artistry and a history that attends to U.S. imperialism and Black freedom struggles is the purpose of "Built with Our Empty Fists." It rewrites the story of Black Power martial artists by taking them out of the theoretical and the performance of solidarity and into the lived practice of social progress, social movements, and Black freedom organizing.[15]

III. Theoretical Frameworks

Interdisciplinary works that explore the long reach of U.S. Empire shape the very beginnings of this dissertation. The works of scholars such as Victor Mendoza, Paul Kramer, Andrew Friedman, and Amy Kaplan have led to me to ask: How do we grapple with intimate relationships formed in the crucible of US power abroad? Mendoza and Kaplan note how the cultural and political anarchy produced by U.S. imperialism abroad inevitably changes the metropole and its culture. Because of this, the boundaries of what is American and what is America are "ever-shifting boundaries between the domestic and the foreign."[16] This insight has

[15] One of the interventions in the field of Black Power Studies that I help to contribute to is the usage of the Cold War as a central analytic. Civil Rights history and Black Left history texts specifically have explored Black Activism in relationship to the Cold War and McCarthyism. For examples, see Dayo F. Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2013). But Black Power Studies has looked less in depth at this relationship, even though Third World Revolutionary ideals are very much built by the Cold War.

[16] Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1. Amy Kaplan's book serves as a push to the field to understand how U.S. empire not only affected the politics of occupied territories but also affected the political shifts in the metropole itself. She uses anti-imperialist, critical reading practices to locate the United

had a lasting impact on whether martial arts are seen as "oriental" or American. To this end, Andrew Friedman's point in *Covert Capital* that erroneously "we recast empire as something that always happens somewhere else...having no insistent and tortured echoes in the cul-de-sacs of everyday spatial and domestic American life" reverberates in my work.[17] Using the theoretical moves of these scholars, I suggest that intimate contact occurred between U.S. military personnel and Asian martial artists, adding to the various forms of intimacy and bodily contact already explored in the scholarly literature. As I discuss in the Background section, this contact created a chain of events that allowed Black veterans to use these practices to alter the nation-state both by aiding and subverting its law enforcement units. U.S. cultural imperialism and colonialism ironically motivated instructors to teach martial arts as mental and cultural decolonization. Thus, in this project, I take up a call issued as early as 1994 by Donald Pease and Amy Kaplan in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. They urged scholars within American Studies' orbit to examine empire and US imperialism as defining components of American culture. Here I continue the work of scholars who seek to understand how U.S. Empire and militarism bear upon 20th century African American history. Particularly, I draw on Kramer's understanding of empire as "exercising sovereignty and power over peoples denied rights that were increasingly coming to define the modern-state..[and] inventing ideologies to calibrate inclusion in these expanding and hierarchical polities."[18]

States as shaken by its own military violence aboard. U.S. imperialism creates a nightmare for itself because its expansion threatens to incorporate more nonwhites. This throws citizenship and Americanness into chaos, shatters national coherence, and produces ambiguous racial identity for the republic. When the U.S. could no longer expand across North America and was faced with the closing of the romanticized, problematic "Frontier," annexations of territories like Hawaii, Philippines, and Puerto Rico produced a "disembodied" American nationalism. This nationalism did not desire to incorporate peoples from the territories but rather desired access to non-continental networks that could serve as markets and spheres of political influence. Because of this, the American state has grappled with how its imperial gains can fracture the hegemonic racial and cultural ideologies that hold the U.S. together. Pages that discuss this more include 19 and 96.

[17] Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of U.S. Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 219.

[18] Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, and the Philippines*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 4.

Throughout this dissertation, I focus on U.S. imperialism through the lens of the "Cold War." My usage of the Cold War also does not pivot specifically upon analyzing the U.S.'s relationship to the Soviet Union but on how U.S-Soviet competitions informed U.S. interactions with people of color globally. American global politics and various forms of warfare informed how Third World people built coalitions, formed gender identities, fought for freedom, and created cultural productions in the mid to late 20th century. I build upon scholars such as Jodi Kim in my usage of "Cold War." Kim's 2004 work, *Ends of Empire*, theorizes how a genealogy of the Cold War is simultaneously always a genealogy of U.S. Empire. Instead of being a solely historical event, the Cold War is a long standing "recursiveness."[19] As a "recursiveness," it is a "structure of feeling," "a knowledge project," and an "interpreting hermeneutic."[20] As an epistemology and production of knowledge, the Cold War "exceeds and outlives…historical eventness" and creates a "protracted afterlife" with "false endings."[21] Because of how ideas from the Cold War circulated and continue still, I agree with Kim that we lose interpretative depth if we analyze Cold War imperialism as an event tied to a certain period. The spread of martial arts that happened during the Cold War has "outlived" the Cold War itself. The ways that Black martial artistry is associated with anti-White supremacy and orientalism have had a long "afterlife" as well.

To properly analyze ideas about Black empowerment and decolonization, I contend with the intricacies of Black nationalism. Monographs such as Wilson Moses' *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism,* Kevin Gaines' *Uplifting the Race*, and Michele Mitchell's *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* urge us

[19] Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire*: *Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.
[20] Kim, *Ends of Empire,* 3.
[21] Kim, *Ends of Empire,* 4.

to think about the hybridity of Black nationalism. Moses, Gaines, and Mitchell contend that conservative strands of Black Nationalism span the long 19th century. Conservative nationalists conceived racial uplift in order to generate progress and to respond to White supremacist nationalist politics. However, this idea often emphasized Black nationalist versions of capitalism and service to the community and state. Particularly during the 20th century, more "radical" or leftist nationalists challenged these pillars and called for political and labor cultures.

There are crucial points of overlap that unite the conceptualizations of Black nationalism and Black Power in the case studies. They were all concerned with Black community development and Black institution building. Black struggles for autonomy in the home and neighborhood produced strategies to improve education, public services, and modes of employment. By passing on their art as health and self-defense practices, martial arts instructors participated in community building as well as social uplift and revolutionary change, including efforts to refashion Black manhood and Black womanhood and update Black connections to spiritual strength and bodily self-determination.[22]

Underscoring both ideological overlap and departure in martial arts practice is important. For many subjects discussed here, "Black Power" and "Black nationalism" are not synonymous terms. Since the Black Power movement and Black nationalism are both politically and conceptually diverse, neither "conservative" nor "revolutionary" nationalist captures the full range of ideologies or martial arts practiced by organizations explored in *Built with Fists.* The common binary between cultural and revolutionary nationalism also falls short when analyzing points of commonality and departure in martial arts practice, and I only use these terms when

[22] Not all organizations' goals also fully explain the reasons why women participated in martial arts, especially women who used Black and Third World Feminism to critique patriarchal nationalism and gender roles.

mentioned by my sources.[23] The Nation of Islam, for example, used martial arts and armed self-defense trainings to build autonomy in the United States during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Its members refused military service to the U.S. because they were building their own economically and militarily sufficient communities based on conservative Black masculinity. This was similar and yet different from the usage of martial artistry as a Black Art, a self-defense practice, and an educational tool by the Congress for African People during the late 1960s and early 1970s. CAP's martial arts program was related to but also different from the reasons that the Black Panther's Oakland Community School decided to teach its students martial arts as an urban survival tool and health practice in the mid-1970s. Moreover, the reasoning of these groups does not capture the goals of all martial arts schools that believed in Black Power but never belonged formally to an organization. Martial arts schools like the Black Karate Federation, discussed below, demonstrated 1) that many Black martial arts instructors related martial arts practice to Black Power philosophies about liberation and 2) that teaching martial arts itself was a demonstration of the period's general social and political awareness.[24]

[23] According to Scot Brown, "Black cultural nationalism has been broadly defined as the view that African Americans possess a distinct aesthetic, sense of values, and communal ethos emerging from either, or both, their contemporary folkways and continental African heritage. From a cultural nationalist perspective, this collective identity informs African American's historical and prospective mission and unique contributions to humanity. Typologies of nationalism provide significant insights into specific dimensions of Black political thought but fall short of capturing the ideological complexity of a given activist or organization." See page *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6. During the mid to late 1960s, self-proclaimed revolutionary nationalists, particularly from the Panthers, inaccurately painted themselves as starkly different in action and thought. They believed that cultural nationalists were inherently weak and unwilling to 'pick up the gun…' From their standpoint, this readiness to use force stood at the heart of what distinguished them from the cultural nationalists." See Scot 114. Scott rightfully critiques these distinctions on page 115: "Panther leaders and spokespersons positioned the practical and fearless revolutionary nationalism as the correct alternative to the nonthreatening cultural nationalist escapist. In fact, there was an attempt to displace US's self-styled African American culture with the party's own invented 'revolutionary culture.'" What the Party presented was its own "essentialist conception of Africa" that used an "ever-fighting" image soldiers in Congo, Mozambique, Angola, and Zimbabwe to represent anti-colonialism. By the mid-1970s, it becomes clear these distinctions are false as even the Panthers' idea of cultural thought and organizing grows similar to that of US and CAP.

[24] Steve Muhammad of the BKF did eventually join the Nation of Islam but not until 1982. See Steve Muhammad and Donnie Williams, *BKF Kenpo: History and Advanced Strategic Principles* (Burbank, CA: Unique Publications, 2002).

IV. Background: A Brief Look at American Martial Arts and its Transnational Relationship to Militarism and Law Enforcement

The relationship between Asian martial arts, militaristic nationalism, and global politics dates to the early 1900s. Yet the U.S.'s entrance into World War II permanently changed its relationship to unarmed self-defense.[25] Part of Japan's military confidence stemmed from thinking that **"**their troops were superior, physically, mentally, and psychologically…given the public education system."[26] They viewed "American soldiers [as] out of shape, overfed, and undertrained" who could not defeat smaller Japanese soldiers.[27] Striving to compete with German preparedness, Winston Churchill supported measures to provide British "Special forces" or "Commandos" with intensive physical training.[28] Though trainers seasoned in Asian martial arts did not provide instruction for most of these units, many of the fighting methods were influenced by William W. Fairbairn, a former Shanghai police superintendent with a second-degree black belt in judo.[29] Upon the heels of Pearl Harbor, the U.S. forces embraced the British commando's training and taught it to a wider range of soldiers.[30] According to martial arts studies scholar Joseph Svinth, each branch developed its own combat system derivative. Perhaps thousands of soldiers learned from a simplified training curriculum forged by Fairbairn and Rex Applegate, his American acolyte, who wrote the 1943 manual called "Kill or Get Killed."[31] Practiced by the CIA's predecessor, the Office of Strategic Strategies, the system focused on the

[25] For more, see Jared Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip! How Bodybuilders, Soldiers and a Hairdresser Reinvented Martial Arts for America* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016) and Joseph Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," in *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, ed. by Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010).
[26] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 73.
[27] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 73.
[28] Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," 590.
[29] Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," 590 and *History of Army Combatives* (Fort Benning: United States Army Combatives Course 1/29 Infantry Regiment, 2017), 3.
[30] Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," 590.
[31] *History of Army Combatives*, 3.

"classic palm-heel to chin, knee-to-groin method usually associated with World War II hand-to-hand fighting systems."[32] Conversely, the Coast Guard learned under the tutelage of former heavyweight boxing champion, Jack Dempsey, studying "arm locks, chokes, defense against weapons," etc.[33] While jujitsu influenced the Army and Air Force programs because of officers like Captain Smith mentioned above, the bulk of soldiers learned techniques from professional wrestlers on their local bases.[34]

Almost mimicking Japan, American judo programs spread to high schools and universities in this period, before losing favor to the less menacing and more standardized game of football.[35] Though far from universal, principals threatened to teach students how to break arms and knee groins. Such provocations exacerbated anxieties that trained youths would turn to delinquency.[36] John L. Griffith, the Big Ten football conference commissioner, promised that his sport prepared youth for the physical and mental trials of war.[37] Ironically perhaps, because women could not play football, self-defense courses for them increased as they joined the military and war industries in larger numbers.[38] Since the Navy wanted to train 30,000 pilots a year, it began its tour de force of a football program in 1942, supposedly teaching young men to fight as members of a team. Though they would never see ground combat, they would still fight

[32] Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," 590.
[33] Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," 590.
[34] Svinth, "Military Unarmed Fighting Systems in the United States," 590.
[35] Joseph Svinth, "American Judo," in *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, ed. Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 566.
[36] Svinth, "American Judo," 566.
[37] Svinth, "American Judo," 567. According to Svinth, unarmed combat instructors dying on the battlefield at the hands of guns helped to decrease the fervor to teach unarmed self-defense to youth and recruits. Football presented a sporting appeal for families and lovers in addition to participants. As well, Jared Miracle points out that it is important to note that wrestling was still a popular pastime for solider at this time and seen as safer than boxing. A lot of professional boxing talent was enlisted in the war effort, an event that effected boxing's postwar history. Because wrestling's grappling was popular among American soldiers, it makes sense that "judo," whether it was actually taught like it was at the Kodokan in Japan, sustained a popular following. For more, see *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*.
[38] Svinth, "American Judo," 567.

to win at all costs. Overall, judo would not disappear, but would similarly develop into a sport just as Kano Jigoro had intended. [39]

The number of American men exposed to Japanese martial arts practices during the war was significant and bled into the postwar years. Though judo's founder purposely spread his art internationally, U.S. servicemen learned karate primarily as a direct result of the Allied occupation of Japan and Okinawa in the years after World War II. Japan's militaristic approach to martial arts and masculinity continued to appeal to U.S. soldiers, but was also perceived as threatening to U.S imperialism. Military officers relocated to Japan "determined to purge Judo of its militarism."[40] When the Allied General Headquarters took over, it shut down formal martial arts education in Japanese schools between 1945 and 1948. According to scholars like Jared Miracle, only karate was allowed to remain because the Headquarters perceived it as an import from the Okinawan and Ryukyu Islands, Japanese-occupied territories.

As the Cold War progressed, the U.S. military interacted not only with karate instructors but with instructors from other parts of Asia as well, including Korea where soldiers learned taekwondo, which itself had been modeled on the modernization of karate in Japan.[41] Far from being solely an informal, extracurricular military activity, units hired martial arts instructors to teach on military bases or allowed soldiers to travel to schools in occupied towns.[42] As the U.S. military restructured the Okinawa Island into a military site of occupation, GIs could wander off the base to drink in bars, solicit sex workers in red-light districts, or to study karate under Okinawan teachers. Bases like those in Okinawa took over the land and economies of the towns

[39] For more on Asian martial arts become 20th century sports, see Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*.
[40] Svinth, "American Judo," 567.
[41] Taekwondo is also written "tae kwon do" or "taekwon-do." They are all the same term. I write "taekwondo" as my standard. But if an artist spells their style name differently, I will write it how they spell it.
[42] These actions produced: 1) recreation for soldiers and 2) state sanctioned cultural imperialism masked as good will. These trainings were also really tactics of "understanding the enemy" and enhancing military efficiency.

they were stationed next to, changing the lives of native occupants, many of whom struggled under General Douglas MacArthur's governance. Some instructors shared their expertise willingly.[43] However, no exchange of self-defense knowledge can be understood outside of the military occupation and the racial, ethnic, and national tensions it created.

As martial arts training spread, Asian instructors' labor became less necessary as more soldiers earned black belts and gained the ability to teach American GIs on bases in the Pacific as well as stateside. Between 1948 and 1952, NYPD officers sent to Japan by the State Department to train police in administration returned with the view that "Japanese methods of holding and restraining prisoners were better than their own."[44] This appeared to influence the Air Force, which likely had the most extensively judo and martial arts program in the 1950s. At the beginning of the decade, Lieutenant General Curtis LeMay's leadership "established official relationships with Japanese martial arts organizations that allowed top-notch Japanese instructors to teach U.S. servicemen."[45] Judo itself became the required hand-to-hand combat training for the Air Force's Strategic Air Command, which oversaw part of the nuclear strike force. By the end of the decade, "tens of thousands of U.S. military personnel were receiving on-base instruction in aikido, judo, or karate through their commands, while tens of thousands more received off-base instruction in martial arts schools in Japan, Okinawa, and Korea."[46]

Because of these events, countless Black servicemen learned martial arts in the Air Force, the Navy, and Marines. When instructed by Asian teachers, Black soldiers were sometimes treated as occupiers. Other times they were treated differently than White soldiers, embodying a complicated position within imperial occupation. In collaboration with Asian instructors who

[43] For more on this see, Hinton and D'Arcy Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline*.
[44] Joseph Svinth, "Police Defensive Tactics Training in the United States," in *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, ed. Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 595.
[45] Svinth, "Police Defensive Tactics Training in the United States," 595.
[46] Svinth, "Police Defensive Tactics Training in the United States," 595.

noticed these complex identities, Black soldiers created spaces to contest the domination of the White military personnel and their constant discrimination and dismissal of black achievement and service.[47] Black soldiers flew home with high ranks and the potential to teach martial arts in their own communities. Others learned from their superior officers. One of these men was Mfundishi Maasi, an instructor for the Congress of African People. He served in the Marine Corps and took Okinawan and Japanese martial arts classes from his sergeant.

In addition to giving access to enlisted men, U.S. militarism and colonialism influenced patterns of Asian instructor migration, as in the case of Florendo Visitacion. Visitacion was born in the Philippine providence of Ilocos Norte in 1910 during U.S. occupation.[48] He trained in indigenous Filipino martial arts before moving to Hawaii and California in search of work in sugar care and grape fields. During World War II, he served in the U.S. army as a medic before settling in New York City, where he would teach students like the Nation of Islam's Moses Powell. As mentioned earlier, Powell taught Nation of Islam members in New York and was one of the first African Americans and martial artists to perform at the United Nations. The Nation of Islam established an early relationship to Asian martial arts and military power also dating back to the 1950s, as I describe in Chapter 1.

Moreover, during the 1950s and 1960s, martial arts instruction became a norm in more police academies across the country. For example, Charles Gruzanski received ranks in a host of martial arts while stationed in Japan, including judo, karate, and aikido.[49] He later taught his methods as a self-defense teacher at the Chicago Police Academy.[50] The increase in militarized, martial arts training by U.S. police and the FBI coincided with their attempts to quell 1960s urban rebellion.

[47] For more, see works such as Hinton and Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline*.
[48] This is the same providence where future President Ferdinand Marcos would be born just seven years later.
[49] Svinth, "Police Defensive Tactics Training in the United States," 595.
[50] Svinth, "Police Defensive Tactics Training in the United States," 595 Svinth goes on to say that "this move ultimately introduced his methods to police departments throughout the central United States."

On February 6, 1968, *The Chicago Defender* quoted Russ Meek, a West Side Chicago "militant" involved in Malcolm X's Association of Afro-American Unity. He argued that the police were "learning how to fight civil disorders with their own brand of violence."[51] Rather than specifically cite firearms training, Meek cites examples of violent training from martial arts, what he calls "the most murderous methods of self-defense known to man."[52] The journalist who interviewed him wrote:

> "[Meek] foresees the government agency using its tactics to penetrate and crush the revolution, 'just as it crushed governments abroad. This is the other end of vast military preparations already begun by urban police forces, white totalitarian-slanted groups and others to kill every Black man in America. And there are historical precedents for what is going on; Germany...South Africa...and the period following the destruction of the Reconstruction subsequent to the Civil War.'"[53]

While Meek was being hyperbolic, the *Defender* later reported that a commission on civil disorders selected by New Jersey's governor agreed with his views on police treatment of Black people after the 1967 Newark Uprising. This placed martial arts practice in conversation with police brutality of other forms.[54]

To complicate the story further, many African American men proudly and optimistically joined police forces in the mid-20th century. They hoped that integration would increase community understanding and safety and contribute to an ethos of racial uplift. Some of them were martial artists themselves and some saw themselves within a genealogy of conservative

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[51] Dave Potter, "Negroes 'Marked for Death': Militant Asserts Genocide 'is White Man's Intention'." Chicago Daily Defender, February 6, 1968, Daily edition, 3, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/494331213?accountid=14667.
[52] Potter, "Negroes 'Marked for Death'", 3.
[53] Potter, "Negroes 'Marked for Death,'" 3.
[54] This also explains the expansive, interstate, and interorganizational spying on organizations such as the Nation of Islam, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Black Nationalism. Black martial artists were among the first teachers to train law enforcement units. In Philadelphia, a young Black martial artist became one of the first martial arts instructors for the city's police.[55] Even the Nation of Islam's Moses Powell would teach the Secret Service and FBI during his lifetime, the same FBI that vehemently tracked his beloved organization for decades. Because of how the U.S. military and police provided access to the discipline and athletic opportunities of martial arts, many Black male instructors used a framework of community uplift and disciplining masculinity to set up local studios or teach at community centers.[56] Wrapped in a world of contradictions, Black men became pioneering martial artists in the U.S., using their skills as competitors, law enforcement officers, and organizers. Some men held all three positions throughout long, sometimes contradictory careers.[57]

To be clear, the martial arts were taking off beyond the military, police forces, and Asian American neighborhoods. Most scholars and practitioners believe that Navy veteran and former boxer Robert Trias built the first "professional (that is, for-profit) karate school in the mainland United States" in 1946.[58] Two years later, he founded the United States Karate Association which licensed other dojos and arranged martial arts tournaments. He supported the spread of the "orientalized pseudo-history, myth, and legends" in the West. Most notable among these was his insistence that karate has roots in martial arts designed by an Indian monk and taught in Chinese Shaolin Temples.[59] While boxing lost some of its popularity because the war had stolen its talent

[55] Ted Pickett, "Compact Youth, 21, First Karate Instructor at the Police Academy," *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 10, 1966, 20, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/532448119?accountid=14667.
[56] This history reveals yet another way in which Black uplift history has often intertwined with law enforcement agencies.
[57] For more on Black judo competitors and tournaments, see Hinton and Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline*. Black men participated in the karate and judo tournaments across the US during the 1950s and 1960s in California and New York.
[58] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 85.
[59] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 85.

and then allowed them to take advantage of opportunities such as the G.I. Bill, Asian martial artistry's "oriental" mystery grew.[60]

Publications' orientalism and fascination produced noteworthy titles and quotes. Jared Miracle points to the *Look* Magazine issue that printed the 1961 article "Karate: Japan's spectacular Art of Handmade Mayhem" by Ken Purdy. Miracle argues that the spread of martial arts into nationally circulating outlets signaled more accurately when attention to martial arts stretched beyond specific regions and military networks.[61] Sensationalizing it made it appear new and different than combat sports and unarmed self-defense seen by most Americans. For his part, Purdy wrote: "Karate is the essence of violence-personal combat carried to an ultimate point;" and, "No open fight between an expert karate or judo player and a boxer should last three minutes, no matter how good the boxer. This is not a disparagement of boxing. Boxing is a sport. Karate is not."[62] His article also added Buddhist mysticism to Asian martial arts and claimed that while "it is designed to kill or maim… karate experts are nearly always mild, quiet, men."[63] These early distinctions by American pioneers and papers are crucial to why "martial arts" became forever tied to "Asianness" in the United States. Such rhetoric forever shaped how Americans viewed karate and judo. Miracle rightly argues:

> The implications are clear: Asian martial arts are better than Western ones because they are more physically powerful and will impart a state of inner peace to the practitioner. By Orientalizing the practice, it then renders participation into something wholly different from the traditionally masculine enterprise of boxing and, therefore, would be suitable for

[60] See Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 91.
[61] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 92.
[62] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 93. This of course contradicts the fact that judo and karate are being mostly taken up as sports in this moment outside of law enforcement.
[63] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 93.

a young man interested in gaining power and identity without being subject to social discourse against his behavior.[64]

In between moments of militarization and oriental fascination, martial arts in Black communities were burgeoning, as seen in one of Trias's own chief instructors, Victor Moore. A Cincinnati native-born in 1943, he competed against Chuck Norris and Jim Kelly. In 1967, Moore served as Bruce Lee's partner for his controversial one-inch punch demonstration at the Long Beach International Karate Championship.[65] A championship fighter and black belt in multiple striking arts who began studying martial arts in the 1940s as a 7-year-old, Moore and other Black artists say he stopped Lee's infamously lightning-fast and "unblockable" punches.[66] His account of that day literally and figuratively counters the mythos around Lee's impact on Black communities, presenting an alternate history explored in the next section.

V. Historization: Black Power and Martial Artistry

In 1966, when 20th century Fox studios produced the *Green Hornet*, the first time Bruce Lee appeared on screens in the U.S., martial arts instruction was well underway in Black Los Angeles. If you drove 20 minutes south from the studio where the show was shot, you would have found Manchester Park. Grandmaster Steve Muhammad (then Steve Sanders) demonstrated his front kicks there for his youthful students in free classes. In the same year, across the country in Newark, New Jersey, Shaha Mfundishi Maasi, could be found in his school, the Hakeem Martial Arts Association.

[64] Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 93.
[65] For more, see Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip!*, 116-117.
[66] "Vic Moore speaks on Bruce Lee?," from interview by Forgottenfury.com with Grandmaster Vic Moore, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo-VIcG0Mg0.

Both of these men cite that the period, a moment of "rising or broadening of consciousness," strongly influenced their desires to teach.[67] A "rising or broadening of consciousness" arises as a central theme in several martial artists' autobiographies or interviews. It coincides with the rise of the Black Power Movement. As Muhammad suggests in the book he co-authored, *BKF Kenpo: History and Advanced Strategic Principles:* "By the mid-1960s, the influence of men such as Dr. King was being rapidly supplanted by younger leaders such as…Stokely Carmichael…who espoused a much more proactive vision of black empowerment."[68] Many instructors were born in an America dominated by Jim Crow segregation policies and geographies. They also witnessed how the dismantling of legal segregation failed to create political and economic equity for many African Americans. As Grandmaster Ron Van Clief wrote in his historical survey, *Black Heroes of the Martial Arts, "Racism* was the order of the day" during their formative years.[69] A group of men lynched the future master of Goju Ryu Karate in 1963 while he served as a United States Marine stationed in Kingston, North Carolina. He remembered the trauma of serving in the Vietnam War between 1963 -1965, a tour where the army required him and other Black soldiers to shoot guerrillas fighters as "white boys killed [them] in combat."[70] He lamented, "When I returned home, I was just another nigger."[71] Van Clief's first interaction with martial arts occurred in the 1950's Brooklyn at the St. John's Community Center. There he trained with two remarkable martial artists, Grandmasters Ronald Duncan and Moses Powell. Ronald Duncan is hailed as the father of American Ninjitsu and was one of the first practitioners to demonstrate ninjitsu in the United

[67] William Hinton and D'Arcy Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline: The Official Oral History of Black Pioneers in the Martial Arts* (Chicago: Modern Bu-jutsu, Inc., 1994), 102.
[68] Muhammad, Steve, and Donnie Williams. *BKF Kenpo: History and Advanced Strategic Principles* (Burbank, CA: Unique Publications, 2002), 46.
[69] Ron Van Clief, *Black Heroes of the Martial Arts* (Brooklyn: A&B Publishers Group, 1994), 13.
[70] Ron Van Clief, *Black Heroes of the Martial Arts*, 12.
[71] Ron Van Clief, *Black Heroes of the Martial Arts*, 12.

States. Moses Powell, a devout member of the Nation of Islam, was the first martial artist to perform at the United Nations. He executed renowned one-finger rolls, where he would throw his entire body onto the mat by using only his index finger. Powell taught students his jujitsu school on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn.[72] Powell taught the style of his Filipino instructor, Florendo Visitacion, and he taught his own style called Sanuces Ryu.

Martial artists also testified that racism was just as evident inside the ring as it was outside. Instructors like Steve Muhammad and Shaha Tolo Naa, who was based out of Chicago, both recounted being cheated out of competition victories due to their blackness, their style of martial arts, or a combination thereof. The racism they witnessed in gym halls in the first tournaments of American martial arts history is no surprise. They configure their histories within "a moment of both intense racism and a burgeoning consciousness. "Consciousness raising" influenced them as it did figures like Kwame Touré (Stokely Carmichael). Achieving "Black Power" became the plan to combat the racism that had not been demolished with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 or the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

In the same year that Steve Muhammad received his black belt and began his free classes, James Meredith was shot during his March on Fear from Memphis, Tennessee to Jackson, Mississippi. Kwame Touré and others continued the March on his behalf. At one of the rallies, he and Willie Ricks (Mukasa Dada) spoke vehemently of Black Power: "This is the twenty-seventh time I have been arrested. I ain't going to jail no more! The only way we gonna stop them white men from whuppin' us is to take over. We been saying freedom for six years-and we ain't got nothing. What we gonna start sayin' now is Black Power![73]" It was the beginning of a

[72] Ron Van Clief, *Black Heroes of the Martial Arts*, 11 and 19.
[73] Peniel E. Joseph, "Introduction: Toward a Historiography of the Black Power Movement," in *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

new era, one that was defined by the murdered Malcolm X's "call for collective self-definition, self-determination, self-reliance, self-respect, and self-defense."[74] He took his last breaths in New York's Audubon Ballroom in 1965, the same year that Ron Van Clief returned from the Marine Corps. With his assassination seared in the hearts of many young Black activists, the shift began from the Civil Rights Movement to the Black Power Movement. Though apart of the same mid and late-20th century Black Freedom Struggle, these different waves of struggle had different purposes and Malcolm X's death influenced many activists like LeRoi Jones to shift their tactics. The playwright and poet left Greenwich Village and the Beat literary movement, moved back to his hometown of Newark, New Jersey, and changed his name to the Swahili, Amiri Baraka, to match his changing sociopolitical identity. His activism reached a new fervor after the 1967 Newark uprising, one of the fieriest rebellions of the time.

Activists like Amiri Baraka were invested in both the arts and politics, unwilling to separate them as discrete forms of nationalism. Newly theorized "Black Arts" emerged and burned as the coal that sparked the Black Arts Movement (BAM). According to Larry Neal, one of the BAM's canonical writers, Black Art sought to reflect "'black realities,' [affirm] black culture, [speak] to the masses of black people, and [align] itself with liberation struggles throughout the world."[75] It was not "protest art," a form Neal criticized because it "screams and masturbates" for white audiences instead of speaking directly to Black audiences.[76] Amiri Baraka's poem "Black Art" epitomized and declared that Black art was "bullshit" unless it embodied and resulted in action.[77]

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[74] Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Crawford, "Introduction," in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Crawford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 4.
[75] Collins and Crawford, "Introduction," 8.
[76] Collins and Crawford, "Introduction," 8.
[77] Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, edited by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal. (Baltimore: Black Classic, 2007), 302.

The passion in these calls was not lost on Black martial artists, whether or not they shared Baraka's politics. By 1969, a year after the publication of the crucial *Black Fire* anthology, Van Clief himself opened his first commercial karate school shortly after resigning from the police department. Also, in that year, Steve Muhammad created a black martial arts community in Los Angeles along with seven other martial artists. They met to work out on Saturday mornings in South Central Los Angeles' Van Ness Park and named themselves the Black Karate Federation (BKF). Like Van Clief, Muhammad had spent the years prior to 1969 enlisted in the United States Marine Corps, where he received his first exposure to martial arts.[78] He would drive from Camp Pendleton in San Diego County and El Toro Marine Base in Orange County to Los Angeles twice a week to train with Ed Parker, earning his first-degree black belt in 1966. Muhammad and his cohort were influenced by older masters like Master William Short. Short owned the Kobayashi School of Karate located near the Inglewood neighborhood. He began training Los Angeles youth in the 1950s when many white-owned dojos did not accept Black students. Short earned a black belt in Shotokan karate while stationed in Tachikawa, Japan, one of the first African Americans to do so. His teachings paralleled those of his friend, Maulana Karenga, the founder of Kwanzaa. Thus, in addition to martial arts, Short taught his students African American history.[79]

The BKF used martial arts to carve, with their closed fists and cocked limbs, both an unabashedly Black identity and a Black artistic consciousness. The BKF derived many of their speedy kicks and hand strikes from Muhammad's American Kenpo training, but they showed their identity in a logo that had clear Black Power and Pan-Africanist symbolism. The logo blazed from the patch of students' uniforms: a clenched, golden fist, its fingers facing away from

[78] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 9.
[79] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 50. Some of Willie Shorts' students became a part of the BKF.

the eye, covered by a red, black, and green banner, upon which a cobra calmly but dangerously hissed, all falling downward toward a scroll with the letters B.K.F written upon it.[80] The patch went through other iterations, including one that wrote "Power to the People" over the cobra and another shaped like a globe with a black fist at the center. In all its usages, the fist's meaning served two purposes. One, it represented the meaning of “kenpo,” which was "Fist Law" according to Muhammad. Two, it stood as a symbol of "power and righteousness."[81] Inspired by the 1968 Olympic Games podium gesture by sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, the BKF used the fist to demonstrate their desire "to fight injustice" and "to overcome racism.”[82] The fist’s golden color signified its wealth and power (Muhammad 82). Its red, black, and green banner mirrored the Pan-African flag created by Marcus Garvey, serving as a "bold and powerful vision" for "all peoples of Africa, regardless of land and birth.”[83] The cobra represented the swift movements of Muhammad and the B.K.F.'s fighters. Also, cobras are considered indigenous to many regions in Africa. Black organizers increasingly used the fist and Pan-African flag colors enjoyed during the period that the B.K.F. formed, placing their choices within a larger shift happening toward the mid- to late-1960s. These symbols allowed the B.K.F. to enter conversations about Black cultural identity, empowerment, and mind/body liberation through their artistic, stylistic choices. Hundreds of girls and boys wore the insignia during the ensuing decade.[84]

In addition to theorizing school representation and uniform, Black martial arts instructors also explicitly tied their pedagogy to the agendas of other contemporary activists. Shaha, or

[80] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 80-81.
[81] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 81.
[82] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 82.
[83] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 83.
[84] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po, 64.

learned elder, Mfundishi Maasi was a cultural and martial theorist who also taught hundreds of students during the 1960s and 1970s.[85] His black belts became "good, community-based people" who were “instrumental [at home] in the communities-working, teaching young folks.”[86] Maasi taught them that life lies with the individual and stressed that “the art[s] can be utilized as an instrument for enlightenment.”[87] Maasi 's teaching was a part of his role with Newark’s Black Community Defense and Development (BCD), a part of the coalition Committee for a Unified NewArk (CFUN), which later folded into the Congress of African People-Newark.[88] Maasi worked directly with Amiri Baraka, whose own transformation and shifting educational values influenced Maasi, as evident in his Pan-Africanist martial arts pedagogy. As Baraka motivated ground workers through his call-to-action poetry, Maasi’s self-defense lessons allowed them to keep organizers safe.

The personal and philosophical links between the Black Arts and Black Power movements and Black martial artistry instructors force us to expand our understanding of both movements to include martial artistry. Besides CFUN, there is evidence that other organizations such as the U.S., the Republic of New Africa, the Revolutionary Action Movement, and the Black Panther Party practiced martial arts for similar yet varying purposes. These organizations’ practices were also enabled by forces explored in the subsequent section.

VI. Methodology

In “Built with Our Empty Fists,” I engage Black Freedom studies, U.S. Empire studies, Asian Pacific Island Studies, 20th Century African American History, and gender history. The

[85] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[86] Hinton and Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline*, 90.
[87] Hinton and Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline*, 88.
[88] Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 109-110.

result is a comparative historical study that emphasizes the Nation of Islam, the Congress of African People (CAP), and the Black Panther Party (BPP). Examining these organizations attends to the breadth of Black martial arts practice while centering differences in period, approach, and the treatment of gender. Because martial arts were taught by organizations with different approaches to safety and self-determination, I argue that organizers drew upon a broad framework for what constitutes self-defense, liberation, and organizing. By focusing on organizational case studies rather than a survey of individual schools or instructors, I illuminate national trends within Black martial arts instruction.

Since the practitioners' (i.e. historical subjects') testimonies overrode what scholars have focused on and the conclusions they drew, I decided to make extensive use of oral histories and sources beyond high profile films. Though organizational papers are crucial, my project is not a conventional archival project because in-depth stories of Black Power martial artists are often absent from brick and mortar archives. Their stories live in compilations written by artists themselves in addition to publications. More important, the rich detail behind their techniques, strategies, and philosophies is more evident in oral histories that I or their students have conducted. Thus, I use oral and archival sources to affirm each other. A significant portion of my written sources comprises biographies or autobiographies. My usage of them is informed by Black Women's History, which has long demonstrated the importance of these genres to the Black archive and American History.

To weave histories together, I pair oral histories that I or others have conducted with magazines and curricula from CAP and sports columns and photographs from *The Black Panther* newspaper, all of which are archived at the Schomburg Center and the University of Michigan's Joseph A. Labadie Collection. I also rely on interview transcripts and government documents

accessed via the Freedom of Information Act, which were collected by the Malcolm X Project Collection at Columbia University.

My first introduction to several of my primary sources was an assistant curator for the Schomburg Center's *Black Power!* exhibit, when I arranged images of female martial artists in political cartoons with clips of Blaxploitation characters like Cleopatra Jones. This experience influenced my decision to critique Black masculinity and explore how developments in Black women's leadership impacted the gender norms and pedagogy of combat sports and self-defense spaces. I challenge assumptions that martial arts practice was exclusively for men and highlight women's experiences.

VII. Chapter Outlines

The dissertation starts by interrogating how gendered ideas about whose bodies should execute or stage unarmed, community defense empowered men and women in the Nation of Islam. Chapters Two and Three analyze how the Congress of African People and the Black Panther Party articulated the relationship of martial arts to political organizing, Black Arts cultural production, and physical education. They upend assumptions that martial arts practice was exclusively for men. Women studied martial arts to sharpen their self-professed "revolutionary" skills, to become fit athletes, and to defend themselves from sexual assault. By comparing these cases, I attend to the breadth of martial arts practice while centering differences in time-period, approach, and the treatment of gender. The final chapter examines the stakes of representing Black martial artists in Blaxploitation films like *Black Belt Jones*. Different audiences perceived these films as empowering, threatening, or both, creating lasting debates over the of Black demonstrations of self-defense.

In Chapter One**,** I analyze how the Nation of Islam became the first Black organization to standardize martial arts training in its programming. I assess how its instructors used martial arts as part of a conservative racial uplift project aimed at improving the condition of Black Americans. During the 1950s and 1960s, the NOI taught jujitsu to create a security apparatus that fostered character building nationwide. Creating its own security force through unarmed self-defense allowed the NOI to secure their own events, which often put them at odds with local police. Using theories developed by Farah Griffin and Ula Taylor, I interrogate how the Nation's ideas about manhood and womanhood precluded women in these decades from practicing martial arts as part of their service and faith. But this was an allure for some Black women. They believed that men protecting them was radical, given the legal system's unwillingness to defend Black women from physical and sexual harm.

In Chapters Two and Three**,** I analyze why the Black Panther Party and the Congress of African People taught martial arts as sports and cultural practices to prepare for literal, mental, and spiritual revolutions against the U.S. state. In the northeast in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the CAP taught martial arts in order to safely elect Black politicians and to help bolster Black Arts Movement activities. In Oakland in the mid to late 1970s, the BPP designed a physical education curriculum that included Jeet Kun Do and tae kwon do, enabling them to cater to the body and soul of youth. These chapters connect literature from Black Freedom studies to oral histories and print culture from these organizations and their independent Black schools. Given the gendered assumptions of martial arts practice, I examine how women such the BPP's Safiyah Bukhari and Assata Shakur discussed martial arts and unarmed self-defense. I examine photographs and articles from *The Black Panther* and *Black News* to demonstrate that women practiced revolutionary martial arts during the 1970s as gender norms shifted. When spaces

existed for them, women studied martial arts to sharpen their self-professed, "revolutionary" skills, become fit athletes, and defend themselves from sexual assault.

In Chapter Four**,** I examine the circulation and impact of Black Power martial arts practice as seen in Blaxploitation films. By close reading film scripts and historicizing the lives of their creators and actors, I demonstrate how popular representations of empowered, Black martial artists were created after Black activists began teaching martial arts, not before. Using biography, I cite how content creators utilized images of Black martial artists in order to evoke strength and liberation in their work. I focus particularly on the gendered differences in the stakes of Black action movies and connect how Black men and women's changing representations in media are reflected onscreen. In the Epilogue, I briefly jump to the 21st century and explore newer and sometimes queerer iterations of the Black Power martial artist. Thereafter, I end with concluding thoughts on how Black martial artistry revises how we think about empire, gender, and organizing in 20th century African American history.

VIII. Note on Terminology and Titling

The term "martial arts" is imprecisely broad yet conjures precise images: Bruce Lee jumping into view in a yellow jumpsuit, brilliantly waving a pair of deadly nunchaku in the air, and jumping back and forth on his heels and staring angrily into the face of his opponent; Jackie Chan sliding through window bars to throw punches at multiple henchmen; Jet Li battling his way out of ropes by kicking through his captors. As I have alluded to, these arts are more than the fantastical achievements of East Asia. They are physical and artful expressions wherein the body is the pen or brush and the environment is its parchment or canvas. The roots of fighting with one's body may indeed be "nearly as old as man" and stem from "man's… [obligation] to

battle, weaponless, the hostile forces of…enemies among his fellow human beings."[89] But what one conceives of as a "martial art" varies widely depending on the traditions and popular culture one has been exposed to and experienced.

So, what are "martial arts"? What does the phrase "martial arts" mean, and where does it come from? Some Western practitioners claim that the term is derived from Latin and denotes "arts of Mars," the Roman god of war, meaning that "martial arts" was originally used to refer to what they call "Historical European Martial Arts."[90] This account replaces East Asian systems such as "karate" and "kung fu" with "renaissance combat systems" such as fencing. They were considered "martial" because they existed "prior to the advent in the mid-1500s of specific civilian weapons for urban dueling."[91] Clements explains that, at this time, the "use of personal fighting skills in Western Europe [was] primarily for military purposes rather than private self-defense."[92] In other words, these arts were martial because they were only used for military training and campaigns and not for civilian self-defense. A practice like fencing was referred to as an "art" because it was believed to not only be a body of systematized knowledge (i.e. a "science"), but also as an aesthetically beautiful skill that has its own methodology (i.e. an "art"). Hence, fencing was both the art and science of swordplay.[93]

Etymologically, there are many different words in Japanese and Chinese (to say nothing of other Asian languages and languages from other parts of the world) that refer to the science and art of fighting and weaponry. However, there is some confusion as what words indicate a specific martial art and which words translate to "martial art." In Chinese, *gōngfu* refers to any

[89] Gichin Funakoshi, *Karate-do: My Way of Life* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1975), viii-ix.
[90] John Clements, "A Short Introduction to Historical European Martial Arts," *Meibukan Magazine*, January 2006, 2, https://martialmindfulness.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Martial-Mindfulness-Meibukan-Magazine-special-edition.pdf.
[91] Clements, "A Short Introduction," 2.
[92] Clements, "A Short Introduction," 2.
[93] Clements, "A Short Introduction," 2.

skill achieved through great effort and practice, yet it is often confused as meaning specifically "Chinese martial arts." For a direct translation of the phrase martial arts into Chinese, one would have to turn to "wushu," which literally means military or martial art. Still, the general application of this definition of "wushu" would be confusing to modern-day users. Instead of being an umbrella term, "wushu*"* is currently used to refer to the sport of *wushu,* which is derived from traditional Chinese martial arts. Likewise, "karate" has mistakenly been used as a term for "Japanese martial arts." *Karate*, or literally "empty [kara] hand [te]" in Japanese, is a specific fighting system that began in the Okinawan Islands and cannot be used to describe Japanese martial arts besides itself. Rather, another Japanese term, "bushido" literally means "way [dō] of the armed gentry [bushi]."[94] It refers to a hereditary class of warriors but has come to be to mean "the way of the warrior." It is from *bushido* that we then get *budō*, which is used in Japanese to mean "the way [dō] of war [bu]" and is used to signify "martial arts." Associating terms such as bushido and wushu with "martial arts" is more appropriate than using words like "karate" as a way of referring to all East Asian "martial arts." Indeed, "martial arts," a European concept that was orientalized during the 20th century, is now mobilized to discuss the indigenous philosophical and fighting arts of human societies across the globe. But the term "martial arts" encompasses a capacious category that can be mobilized to represent many different fighting systems, though Western European and East Asian relationships receive the most attention in scholarship and the public imagination. [95]

[94] Thomas Cleary, translator's introduction to *The Book of Five Rings: A Classic Text on the Japanese Way of the Sword*, by Miyamoto Musashi, xvi, trans. by Thomas Cleary (Boston: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1993),

[95] I would have been remiss if I did not interrogate, discuss, or define this phrase as it frames and undergirds all my arguments. I am thankful here to my exposure to Raymond Williams. After reading his introduction to *Keywords: A vocabulary of Culture and Society*, I realized this task does not involve making a dictionary entry of "martial arts," i.e. providing a definition of the two words as used together. It does involve "making an inquiry into a vocabulary: a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions, in English, of the practices and institutions which we group as culture and society." In beginning my interrogations, I unpack our uses of martial arts and research how these two words have been "bound together" in "certain ways of seeing culture and society." In following the transformation of words' usages in popular vernacular and speech across time,

In order to orient martial arts practices within African American studies, I use the term "martial arts" to signify: 1) embodied health practices for the mind and soul, 2) unarmed, self-defense practices, 3) artistic, cultural practices and "movement arts" and 4) Pro-Black, athletic achievements for progress.[96] I often use martial arts interchangeably with "unarmed self-defense (practice)" when discussing their application for bodily safety in everyday life and political organizing. Alternatively, I substitute martial arts for "combat sports" when referring to their usage within physical education and physical culture programs. This acknowledges that "martial arts" are in conversation with combat sports including American and Western activities like wrestling and boxing, which might be considered martial arts in their own right. Keeping these messy contradictions in mind, I draw influence from African Diaspora Historian T.J. Obi's explanation of the phrase "martial arts":

> While a similar study could be done on the musical or other elements of these arts, it is specifically this technology of combat that I am referring to when I use the term "martial arts." In its North American usage, the term generally signifies Asian unarmed combative practices such as Okinawan karate, Japanese judo, Chinese Kung fu, or Korean Tae Kwon Do. The Western world's failure to recognize African martial arts warrants a brief concluding discussion about the meaning of African "martial arts" and related terms and their relevance to the culture of the enslaved. In purely etymological terms, "martial arts" does not distinguish the various types of activities that can be described by this term. For clarity, I will

Williams reads to me as tracing the conceptual shifts of particular words, even if these shifts happen to be miniscule. By conceptual shift, I mean the point at which the way we reconceive of an idea, giving it a different meaning in a different space and a different period. Because I understand "martial arts" as a conceptualized with continually changing connotations, William's methodology works well for my purposes. For more, see Williams 15.

[96] I give my definition of "movement arts" in Chapter 3.

at times distinguish between war dances and three subcategories of martial arts: combat sports, fighting skills, and martial ways.[97]

Taking a cue from Obi and other martial arts studies scholars, I do not orientalize "martial arts" or assume they are inseparable from a flattened and uncritical association to "Asianness." I use the suffix "-descended" to describe the region of the world to where a martial art is indigenous. For example, I distinguish between "Asian-descended" and "African-descended" martial arts, acknowledging that neither category is a native tradition of the Americas. I am also specific whenever I mention a style of martial arts. Even within regionally designated styles, martial arts substyles differ. Karate and kung fu both refer to countless variations of martial arts, not a singular practice. I typically write broad terms such as these in lower case. When mentioning a specific substyle, like Kupigana Ngumi, I capitalize the word.[98]

As a note on the intersection of reading method and terminology, it is important to mention the careful archival reading practice that must be employed in doing martial arts studies scholarship across national borders and time periods. During the early and mid-20th century, "judo," "jujutsu," and "jiujitsu" were used in the United States to refer to all Japanese arts without specificity or accuracy. A similar occurrence happened to "karate" and "kung fu" after the 1960s and 1970s. In searching for the histories present in this dissertation, it required searching for these words in certain newspapers instead of or in addition to "martial arts," which was not always as prevalent as it is now.

Finally, I want to explain the two inspirations behind my title, "Built with Our Empty Fists: The Rise and Circulation of Black Nationalist Martial Artistry during the Cold War." The

[97] T. J. Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art Traditions in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2008), 8.
[98] Tiger Style tae Kwon's usage and style is described more in Chapter 3. It is a Korean-descended art. Kupigana Ngumi is an African American art that uses movements and philosophies from both Asian descended and West and Central African martial arts. It is described in more detail in Chapter 2.

first is a reference to *kara te* and the "empty hand." The second is an allusion to the long history of African Americans building their communities and institutions, physically and ideologically, with their "bare hands." This dissertation is an intervention precisely because it takes seriously uniting these phenomena in its titling and subsequent analyses.

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CHAPTER 1:

"Let a Black Man Fight Back and that's Treason": Gender, Surveillance, and Unarmed Self-Defense in The Nation of Islam 1955-1965

In July 1959, New York public television aired the primetime documentary "The Hate that Hate Produced." Edited for "maximum shock value," it "sparked a [national] firestorm" through its depiction of the Nation of Islam's Black nationalism.[1] Reporters Mike Wallace and Louis Lomax provided many white viewers with their first exposure to the group's ideologies and caused an outcry from White and Black communities. News outlets went so far as to call the members "black fascists" and "possibly-Communist inspired."[2] The feature ties clips of interviews with and speeches by Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X with footages of the groups' activities. Emphasized in these activities are menacing shots of men executing unarmed self-defense techniques. In the *Autobiography of Malcolm* X, Malcolm X recalled the influx of interview requests he received after the program debuted. American journalists questioned him as to why the Nation preached "hate" and "Black Supremacy."[3] Among the inquiries, he received the question, "Why is your Fruit of Islam being trained in judo and karate?"[4] The Nation of Islam

[1] Marable, Manning, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.
[2] Marable, Manning, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.
[3] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Ballantine Books, 1992), 276.
[4] Malcolm X and Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 277.

(NOI) practiced martial arts as early as 1955.[5] The Fruit, an all men's subdivision, trained to protect mosques, provide security for events, and become bodyguards for leaders.

For Malcolm X and the Nation, martial arts went beyond physical exercise. Martial artistry emphasized character building and responsibility. But character building was not what scared white Americans. Malcolm X reflected:

> An image of Black men learning anything suggesting self-defense seemed to terrify the white man. I'd turn their question around: "Why does judo or karate suddenly get so ominous because Black men study it? Across America, the Boy Scouts, the YMCA, even the YWCA…PAL [Police Athletic League] -- they all teach judo! It's all right, it's fine -- until Black men teach it! Even little grammar school classes, little girls, are taught to defend themselves --.[6]

Though practiced as sports and health practices across the United States, the media questioned Malcolm X as to why young Black men practiced the same physical activities as white families. Malcolm interpreted the line of inquiry to mean that it was both the practice and the image of Black martial artists that terrified white Americans. These images of Black men punching stood in a long lineage of images of defiant Black men that questioned American citizenship through body movement. Future moments of defiant movement included the 1968 Olympic salute when John Carlos and Tommie Smith threw their fists in the air, eerily reminiscent of the Nation's own fighting fists.[7] A decade earlier, the Nation of Islam had already convinced the federal and local law enforcement agencies that Black men's fists should be surveilled and punished. But the

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[5] For more on martial arts training within the Fruit, see Khashon bey Allah, *The FOA Fighting of Allah The "Nation of Gods and Earths Defense for Knowing Self": A Study and History of the Black Gods '120' Styles of the Martial Arts, the Supreme Book In Self Defense* (Morrisville: Lulu Publishing Services, 2016), 8-9.
[6] Malcolm X and Alex Haley, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, 277.
[7] It also resembles contemporary images of Colin Kaepernick kneeling during the national anthem. It should be noted that Kaepernick is not specifically protesting US imperialism and militarism as many Black Power groups and the Olympic Project for Human Rights did.

Nation convinced the many African Americans who joined or respected it that empty fists and martial artistry belonged to an agenda for Black Freedom.

Scholars have evaluated and critiqued the Nation's practices and rhetoric for over 50 years, starting with C. Eric Lincoln's 1961 sociological study, *The Black Muslims in America*.[8] Many of them have written great man histories that center on figures such as Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X.[9] Some scholarship has paid close attention to the Nation's use of nationalist ideology and religious dogma, looking holistically at their approach to Blackness and Islam.[10] More recent studies, including work by Garrett Felber and Zaheer Ali, have sought to understand the rich, political, and cultural complexities of the Nation's organizing.[11] A crucial wave of studies prioritized understanding the role of women, gender, and choice within the Nation. Monographs from Ula Taylor, Dawn Marie-Gibson, Jamillah Karim, and Bayyinah Jeffries grapple with these themes and extend earlier work by Taylor as well as Farah Griffin.[12]

While examining masculinity is embedded in certain scholarship, the focus on the Nation, self-defense, protection, and gender has not included in-depth attention to martial arts practice. Malcolm X's 1963 speech, "Message to the Grassroots," is a source that captures the popular misunderstandings of the group's legacies. Given a few months before he left the group,

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[8] For more 1960s scholarship, See Louis Lomax, *When the Word is Given*: *A Report on Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, and the Black Muslim World* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1963). This is the same Lomax that was involved in "The Hate that Hate Produced" documentary.

[9] See Claude A. Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Herbert Berg, Elijah Muhammad and Islam (New York: New York University Press, 2009); and Manning Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* (New York: Viking, 2011).

[10] For example, see Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975 (Chapel* Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

[11] For example, see Garrett Felber, *Those Who Know Don't Say: The Nation of Islam, the Black Freedom Movement, and the Carceral State* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

[12] See Farah Jasmine Griffin, "'Ironies of the Saint': Malcolm X, Black Women, and the Price of Protection," *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements* (New York: New York University Press, 2001); Ula Y. Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy: Women and the Nation of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Gibson, Dawn-Marie, and Jamillah Ashira Karim, *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); and Bayyinah S. Jeffries, *A Nation Can Rise No Higher than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self Determination, 1950-1975* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

opponents of the speech and the Nation misread it as advocating violence and proactive gun usage. In the speech, Malcolm X argued that,

> If it is wrong to be violent defending black women and black children and black babies and black men, then it is wrong for America to draft us and make us violent abroad in defense of her. And if it is right for America to draft us, and teach us how to be violent in defense of her, then it is right for you and me to do whatever is necessary to defend our own people right here in this country.[13]

Lines such as this could be construed as promoting "inevitable violence."[14] However, such interpretations of this and other Nation language portrayed the group as aggressive and inaccurately aligned armed self-defense practice with its core teachings. Associating the organization with armed revolution and guns overshadowed its purposeful, nationwide use of unarmed self-defense. Though not standardized across region or time period, martial arts were more prominent in the Fruit of Islam's training than arms training. As a result, I contend that the Nation understood "self-defense" to be "unarmed self-defense" in rhetoric and in practice.

In this chapter, I demonstrate how studying the particularities of the Nation's martial artistry reveals a deeper understanding of its connection to gendered forms of U.S. imperialism and community power. The Nation of Islam used martial arts and unarmed self-defense training to build autonomy in the United States. This chapter examines the implications of the Nation of Islam as the first Black organization to standardize martial arts training in its programming. My focus is on the period between 1955 and 1965. During these ten years, the Nation's leadership frequently discussed the importance of self-defense and, as a result, received greatly increased

[13] Malcolm X, "Message to the Grassroots, in *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements*, ed. George Breitman (New York: Merit Publishers, 1965), 9.
[14] Marable, Manning, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.

visibility in African American communities, government briefs, and press coverage. The Nation's martial artistry would serve as a model for how Black organizations could integrate unarmed self-defense into their Black Power strategies and drew significant law enforcement surveillance. The chapter interrogates how the Nation's ideas about gender excluded women from self-defense practice. I analyze how women willingly entered the Nation to experience a feeling of protection. Methodologically, I read oral history transcripts from Columbia University's *Malcolm X Project* alongside FBI briefs and organizational papers in order to balance voices from the Nation with voices from the state. I analyze FBI accounts as critically as I analyze newspaper articles and oral testimony. I do not take their reports of what the Nation said and did as fact, but as interpretations of facts or events. My methods show that martial arts training gave Nation members across the gender spectrum rhetorical and physical access to Black Nationalist notions of self-defense, self-reliance, and the feeling of safety. This safety was both fraught and surveilled but provided an avenue to achieve the Black bodily and community integrity that Black Power trumpeted, even without the support of legal protection.

I. Building a Nation: How Detroit and Asia shaped the Nation's View on Militarism

In 1930, Fard Muhammad founded the Nation of Islam in Detroit. An enigmatic figure, most of his background information is derived from second-hand information and conjecture. Likely of Arab-descent, he concentrated on recruiting African Americans to his organization during the Great Depression.[15] Fard attracted people to the Nation of Islam by using qualities shown by the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Moorish Science Temple. By 1927 and 1929, respectively, both organizations began to fold in the Motor City. Fard filled the void

[15] See Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*, 2; Dawn-Marie Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), 13, and Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 12.

by mixing Black Nationalism with religious ideology and racial uplift rhetoric.[16] Fard borrowed recruitment tactics from Jehovah's Witnesses and the Freemasons to attract followers within the economically struggling city. [17] As time progressed, the group forged an identity that syncretized interpretations of Islamic thought, racial uplift, and Black capitalism with vocal critiques of White Supremacy and U.S. militarism.[18] Police surveillance of the Nation started as early as 1932 when law enforcement investigated them for connections to murder.[19] In 1933, the city's police forced Fard out of the city, leaving the leadership of organization to his mentees, notably Elijah Poole.[20]

Elijah Poole ascended to the top of the Nation of Islam, but it was Clara Poole, his partner, who initially persuaded him to join the organization. Clara Poole sojourned solo to the organization's earliest meetings. She worked as a domestic laborer, and the Nation promised her and other black women a new "nation" to exist within. The new Nation "promised black women a source of protection, financial stability, and loving husbands" and "stirred feelings of racial pride."[21] As Historian Ula Taylor writes, "The NOI also vowed to confront the devaluation of black womanhood and its damaging consequences. It inverted the racist belief that black women were immoral and unworthy of praise and safeguarding."[22] As Elijah Poole struggled to find a job during the Depression and sought refuge in alcohol, Clara Poole turned to Fard Muhammad to strengthen her family. Her fervor led to her husband's attendance. Elijah Poole sobered up and began to participate actively in the organization. He and Clara also took on the family name

[16] Clegg, *An Original Man*, 41 and 69 and Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam*, 14.
[17]Clegg, *An Original Man*, 72-73, and Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam*, 17.
[18] For more, see Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 107. According to her, "the NOI's direct opposition to white supremacy was itself radical. This was the NOI's magnet, its black nationalist core. The NOI's lethal critiques of white power emboldened members to support and trust its leadership. As they joined temples (renamed mosques in 1962) around the country, they chose to accept a moral lifestyle and dedicate themselves to personal discipline."
[19] Clegg, *An Original Man*, 29-31.
[20] For more, see Clegg, An Original Man, 33-35 and Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam,* 20.
[21] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 4.
[22] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 4.

Muhammad. When Fard Muhammad left Detroit, Elijah Muhammad stepped in and preached about racial injustice and Black socioeconomic subordination within the U.S. His rhetoric legitimized the request for land for a separate Black nation that the organization became known for.[23]

Muhammad also expanded the scope of the Nation's transnational critiques of U.S. militarism and foreign policy. At its inception, Fard adopted a relationship to Japan espoused by the UNIA, reflecting that organization's fascination with Japan's pre-World War II military and political power.[24] Even the notorious Nation claim that a Mother Plane that would save Muslims from Earth was related to Japan. According to Muhammad, the plane was going to depart Japan and cross the Pacific as part of the U.S.'s demise at the hand of darker peoples.[25] Sympathy for Japan became a part of the rubric for FBI surveillance of the group. After the war, Nation ministers preached how Japan cracked American indestructibility at Pearl Harbor and argued that North Korea and China would now fight U.S. influence in Asia.[26]

Supporting Asian countries, even if they were imperial powers themselves, fueled the Nation's critique of the U.S. nation state. This stance proved to be important as the Nation of Islam positioned itself as the new "nation" that its members belonged to. As members of the Nation of the Islam, Muhammad's followers refused to join the U.S. military. The group contended that

[23] For more, see Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam*, 22 and 33. There is more on this topic in the James 3X FBI file. On April 2, 1965 James 3Xpparently said, "The other day thirty thousand marched on Birmingham, Alabama. What did they accomplish? They marched on Washington, what did they get? They are praying to the wrong God. Christianity has failed the Negro. If we had third thousand people marching on Alabama, Alabama would have been our state. ----- Mr. (ELIJAH) Muhammad is asking for land. With land we can produce our own factories, clothing, trains, planes, etc. Land is what the white man is fighting for in Viet Nam. If we would back Mr. Muhammad, we can get freedom overnight. We can tell the white man to give Mr. Muhammad what he is asking for or we will turn hell upside down." See James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section III: Statements Made by Subject Reflecting Knowledge of the Tenets of the NOI, Newark Office, 1965, 5.
[24] See Clegg, *An Original Man*, 66 and 82; Edward E. Curtis IV, *Black Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam*, 20.
[25] For more discussions on The Nation of Islam and Japan. See Claude Clegg, *An Original Man: The Life and Times of Elijah Muhammad* and Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam*.
[26] See Joseph Gravitt (Brother Joseph X) FBI File, Memo, New York Office, June 19, 1955, 6. An agent cites Gravitt as saying, "Korea and china are running the 'White Devils' out of Asia. He stated the Japanese were very smart people. He told the group that the Japanese had come to the US and bowed to the 'Devils' and then showed them how easy it was to attack the US by force."

there was no sense in any Black man fighting wars defending someone else's rights. In 1942, the FBI arrested Elijah Muhammad and several other Nation men for refusing to register for the draft. The bureau accused Muhammad of draft evasion and outright sedition and conspiracy to support foreign enemies.[27]

By the 1960s, FBI reports tracked instances when Nation of Islam Ministers mentioned war. An FBI informant alleged that on January 29th, 1964, James 3X Shabazz, leader of the Nation's Temple #25 in Newark, [28] said,

> You Negroes will go into foreign countries fighting for the white man's freedom. You climb up the hills, crawl in the mud of Master's freedom, not yours---the Negro is just like a hunting dog for the white man. Every time the white man gets into trouble, he turns you loose [sic]. After the war is over, he will bring you back to his country and put a chain around your neck until he is ready to use you again. The so-called American Negro has fought in seven major wars defending the white man's freedom. Out of the seven wars, the Negro didn't even earn a cup of coffee in Woolworth's.[29]

A year later, he also apparently said, "The United States fought against Japan. Today the Japanese people are better off than we are...When the white man asks you to fight his wars, you should tell him to hell with him and his wars."[30] The Nation admired and vocally supported non-Western nations that fought or triumphed against the U.S.[31] This support showed itself during the

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[27] For more, see Clegg, *An Original Man*, 82-92.

[28]James 3X Shabazz is also known as James Russell McGregor.

[29] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section III: Statements Made by Subject Reflecting Knowledge of the Tenets of the NOI, Newark Office, 1964, 5.

[30] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section III: Statements Made by Subject Reflecting Knowledge of the Tenets of the NOI, July 23, 1965, 5.

[31] For example, it was "advised" on April 2, 1965 that James 3x said, "The other day thirty thousand marched on Birmingham, Alabama. What did they accomplish? They marched on Washington, what did they get? They are praying to the wrong God. Christianity has failed the Negro. If we had third thousand people marching on Alabama, Alabama would have been our state. ---- Mr. (ELIJAH) Muhammad is asking for land. With land we can produce our own factories, clothing, trains, planes, etc. Land is what the white man is fighting for in Viet Nam. If we would back Mr. Muhammad, we can get freedom overnight. We can tell

U.S.'s extensive, military presence in Vietnam during the Cold War. In 1965 and 1966, James 6X Shabazz, the minister of the Birmingham Temple, reportedly said that the Vietnam War put African Americans first in combat even though they were last in society, equating the draft to lynching.[32] The Nation's anti-Vietnam War sentiment was also shaped by conclusions that U.S. foreign militarism and domestic racism made Black soldiers more similar to Vietnamese fighters than to white patriots.[33] Another informant summarized Malcolm X' sentiments on this topic. Because the U.S. treated Black men who returned from military service poorly, the U.S. could not be the Black man's nation and its flag could not be his flag.[34] Thus, Black men and Black people needed their own nation that affirmed countries fighting Western powers like the U.S., Britain, and France.[35]

The fledging "nation" opposed serving a nation-state antagonistic to Black people and, in response, created its own military formations to appear self-sufficient. It developed branches to shape and monitor both men and women. The Fruit of Islam unit was crucial in this: to be an autonomous Black nation within a hostile nation, the group needed to guarantee safety for its

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the white man to give Mr. Muhammad what he is asking for or we will turn hell upside down." See James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section III: Statements Made by Subject Reflecting Knowledge of the Tenets of the NOI 1965, July 23, 1965, 5. Also see James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section III: Statements Made by Subject Reflecting Knowledge of the Tenets of the NOI, Newark Office, 1964, 7. It states: "NK T-1 advised on Nov 5th, 1964 that at an NOI meeting at MM #25 on [redacted]1964, subjected stated, 'It is foolish for the so-called Negro to think he can integrate and have freedom, justice and equality with his slave master's children. The only thing the white man recognizes in a people is power. China has the atomic bomb, now she gets recognized by the world.'"

[32] James London FBI File, Section VII: NOI Teachings, Birmingham Office, March 25, 1966, 14. James 6X Shabazz is also known as James London.

[33] James London FBI File, Section VII: NOI Teachings, Birmingham Office, March 25, 1966, 14. According to the file, "At a meeting of Muhammad's Mosque, Birmingham held [redacted]1965, Minister James in commenting on the war in Viet Nam stated the Negro need not be in Viet Nam fighting as they are fighting against themselves." At another occasion, something similar was reported: "On [redacted] 1966, at a meeting of Muhammad's Mosque, Birmingham, Minister James London said there is no need for the black man to go to Viet Nam only to shoot at another man 'as black as you are.'" See page 17

[34] James London FBI File, Atlanta Office, October 20, 1959, 7-8.

[35]This rhetoric should not be seen as divorced from the rhetoric of the Asiatic black man. We must be careful to understand that this statement did not imply that all Black and African peoples were the same. But that Black people emanated from a continent that was originally both a connected Africa and Asia. As explained by a response to the question "Why does the devil call our people Africans?" in a series of circulated Nation of Islam lessons: "To make our people of North America believe that the people on that continent are the only people they have and are all savage…The original people live on this continent and they are the ones who strayed away from civilization and are living a jungle life. The original people call this continent Asia, but the devils call it Africa to try to divide them. He wants us to think we are all different. See Lesson No. 1, Lessons Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

members and events. Consequently, to exist within the empire of the United States, martial arts training and community safety became important to the Nation of Islam's nation building project and independent security apparatus.

II. Security, Character, and Mediated Paternalism: Anxious Masculinities and NOI Martial Artistry

The Nation of Islam was the first Black community and Black Nationalist organization to systematically practice martial arts. It was a progenitor and incubator for martial artists who filtered into other organizations such as the Congress of African People. As recalled by James Johnson, an instructor for the Congress of African People-Camden, some of the earliest Black and Black nationalist martial artists in Camden, New Jersey were members of the Nation of Islam. This included men such as Earlie Kelly, a lieutenant in the Nation and a butcher, and John Minson. Both men belonged to Temple #12 Philadelphia and its Westville, New Jersey branch, during the 1960s. As a martial artist, Minson performed the two-finger pushup famously demonstrated by Bruce Lee in 1964.[36]

A similar story occurred in Newark. Before he became the instructor for the Committee for a Unified Newark, later the Congress of African People-Newark, Mfundishi Maasi trained with James Cheatham after he returned from the military in 1962. A Nation of Islam member, Cheatham owned the only Black operated martial arts school in the Newark. Cheatham inspired Maasi to teach martial arts to the Fruit of Islam at Mosque #25.[37] Martial arts practice was central to the Fruit's training because it "discipline[ed] the men [so that] they would have a

[36] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. According to his interview, Johnson met Minson around 1970/71 so Minson would have started training in martial arts prior to this. Minson had been an assistant foreman and also worked at a bakery on Haddon Avenue in Camden. He lived on Empire Avenue near the Parkside neighborhood. For more on Bruce's demonstration of the two-finger pushup and its context, see Chapter 3.

[37] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013. Also See William Hinton and D'Arcy Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline: The Official Oral History of Black Pioneers in the Martial Arts* (Chicago: Modern Bu-jutsu, 1994), 51 and 85.

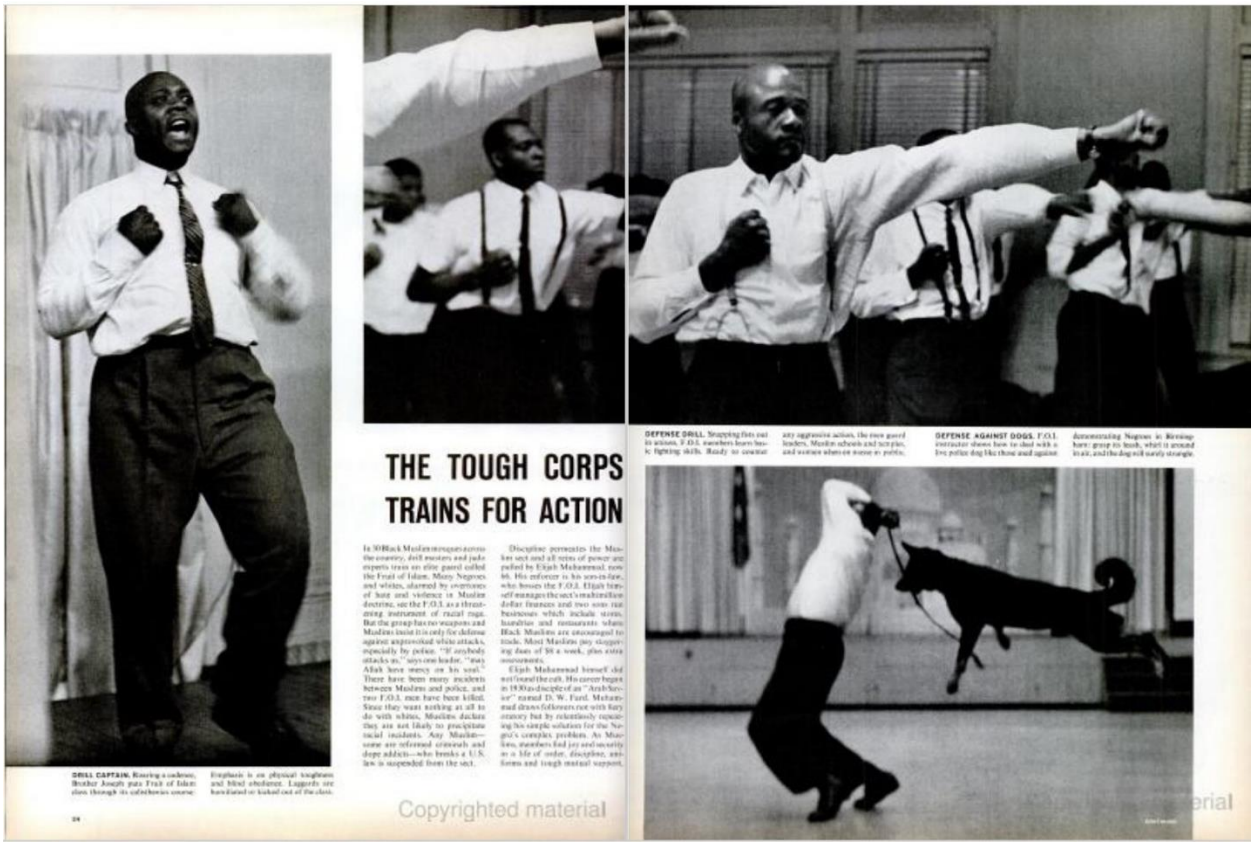

Figure 1-1 Photographs by Gordon Parks*, "Black Muslim's Cry Grows Louder," Life* Magazine 53, No. 22*,* May, 31, 1963,24-25.

concept of community and commitment to order within the community."[38] Looking back on his experience teaching and training, Maasi remarked that it was highly "rewarding to see Black men unified toward a common purpose."[39] The group's "lethal critiques of white power" inspired the men to accept a "moral lifestyle," commit to "personal discipline," and be a part of military-esque training. [40] (See Figure 1-1.)

Religious morality and gender molded the Nation's performance of conservative, protective masculinity and martial artistry. As Elijah Muhammad Jr. noted in the 1962 "Instructions to Ministers and Captains," "As a Captain I am training myself and I am training the men to be soldiers in this great fight, I am training the men to fight and even die for what [Elijah

[38] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[39] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[40] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 107.

Muhammad is] Teaching."[41] But this fight was not actual war. The Nation never advocated outright warfare against the United States or rallied for revolution. This mentality of being ideologically and politically at war stemmed from Elijah Muhammad Sr.'s anxieties over masculinity and need to capture the attention of other Black men. Historian Claude Clegg stresses how Muhammad's "struggle with joblessness in the late 1920s and early 1930s debilitated him emotionally."[42] The Great Depression almost destroyed Elijah Muhammad, which motivated Clara Muhammad to bring him to Fard Muhammad's meetings. Like many Black men raised with Victorian gender roles and Black racial uplift ideology, his manhood and self-esteem hinged upon his ability to provide for his family.[43] Muhammad felt a strong sense of failure to perform his duties as a man when he could not hold a job. He turned to alcoholism and was unable to help Clara Muhammad avoid domestic service, an exploitative and often abusive environment for Black women. Combined with government assistance, she provided financially for her family during these years.[44] She became so frustrated with Elijah Muhammad's behavior she apparently hit him when he spiraled into a stupor and lost money.[45]

To prevent other Black families from a similar fate, the Nation of Islam developed an empire dominated by gender norms. It carefully curated ideologies about masculinity, femininity, the body, and safety. Trying to get away from his own past shortcomings, Muhammad and his commanders in The Fruit created regiments so that Black men could no longer be "feminized" by their failure to protect and provide for their families. The nation's approach to masculinity

[41] Elijah Muhammad Jr, letter, 20 November 1962, Instructions to Ministers and Captains Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[42] Claude Clegg, *An Original Man,* 16.
[43] See Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 27. They say, "The NOI appropriated the mainstream essentialist construction of whites as 'civilized' and African Americans as 'savage,' but reversed it. In doing so, the NOI ascribed cultural conceptions of the white middle-class male to the 'Black Muslim,' making him the hardworking provider in a suit. Also see Claude Clegg, Claude Clegg, *An Original Man,* 16. He who wrote, his "self-esteem was inextricably tied to his ability to feed and take care of his wife and the children."
[44] For more see, See Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation* 6-7, 12, and 15.
[45] Taylor. *The Promise of Patriarchy,* 9. This account of this incident is attributed to their daughter, Lottie Muhammad.

argued that the white men were "effeminate" and "siss[ies]."[46] It also contended that Black women should not be the sole bread winners and that Black men should avoid contact with white women for their own safety.[47] The heteronormativity, homophobia, and gendered racializations entrenched in such statements were formed by men who had been denied access to certain ideals of manhood.

Fitness seamlessly connected to these normative ideals of patriarchy and protection. The Fruit of Islam captains developed a meticulous training regimen over time. It pivoted on the idea that the Nation needed to "make all men and boys…brave fighters and willing at any time to give their life for Allah's sake."[48] Temples conducted able-bodied, group physical fitness classes weekly.[49] Their broad engagement in physical culture included sports as well. Early Nation of Islam rhetoric seemed to decry sports participation for its members. However, Elijah Muhammad clarified by the 1960s that, "Muslims are not unfavorable to clean sports and clean entertainment that leads to the strengthening and betterment of the society."[50] On the heels of heroes such as Muhammad Ali, the Nation's public critique of sports rested on the indecency of Black exploitation in professional sports and the partying that accompanied American athletic culture.[51]

[46] Wallace D. Muhammad, Ministers' Meeting Excerpt, 25 February 1975, Ministers' Kit March 14, 1975 Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. To quote Wallace Muhammad, "The white man is effeminate himself, so he sympathizes with 'sissy' in Black people."

[47] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 62. Muhammad said, "go down to one of the big hotels and tell them you want to get a room there and see what happens to you. Or go down in the deep south and walk on the streets with a white woman…The first thing you know you will be right here [pointing to the picture of the lynching."

[48] Elijah Muhammad, Instructions to the M.G.T., Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. It continues that they should "stick fast together in the battle like a solid wall."

[49] Classes developed mental character and physical character based in able-body and normative body-type standards. While scholars debate whether or not the Nation was inclusive of abilities and non-skinny bodies, it seems accurate that weight could be an issue. The idea that a "Muslim should not be fat because by eating once a day his weight will be kept down" entered Nation vocabulary as early as May 29th, 1959. See Malcolm K. Little FBI File, New York Office, November 17, 1959. This idea is also in Elijah Muhammad's "How To Live To Eat" manuals.

[50] Write up on the Nation's position on Entertainment, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York,

[51] Write up on the Nation's position on Entertainment, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

However, martial arts did not qualify as combat sports in the Nation of Islam. Martial artistry counted as a self-defense tactic. Unlike Ali, the Fruit were not training to become world-class athletes. They were intended to be effective security for people who had "disavow[ed] allegiance to the United States."[52] In a joint CIA/FBI file from 1957 and 1958, various agents surmised that The Fruit were:

> responsible for maintaining the internal security of the temple. The command structure includes a captain, who is usually an older, trusted member, and various lieutenants, depending on the size of the particular FOI unit. Although the captain is in charge of the FOI, consultation with the minister usually precedes any decision or action. The FOI is governed by a military system wherein the members are controlled by general orders similar to those issued by regular US military organizations.[53]

By tracking the Nation's military etiquette, the FBI failed to see the irony that U.S. militarism influenced the Nation's decision to organize itself militarily and practice martial arts. But this irony led to another irony: attempting to disinvest from American citizenship and militarism led the Nation to uncritically replicate those organizational forms in its own internal practice. [54] In

[52] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Memo, Baltimore Office, April 22, 1955, 2. Though the so-called "paramilitarization" of The Fruit is overemphasized by scholars, aspects of it are more detailed than often highlighted. Their "General Orders" were highly detailed, noting how to watch, keep, and leave assignments and how to properly disseminate information. The Fruit could also be as equally punitive as the U.S. military as well. Certain members were responsible for investigating members who missed meetings and who were suspected of having sex out of wedlock. For examples, see James Russell McGregor FBI File, Memo, Baltimore Office, January 25, 1955,1 and CIA/FBI Joint NOI File, 1957-1958.

[53] CIA/FBI Joint NOI File, 1957-1958.

[54] Given the Nation's aversion to members joining the military, it begs us to ask the question: how were they so good at mimicking military formations? Notable ministers such as Malcolm X never spent time in the army, though he was a key trainer and organizer for the Fruit of Islam. Others such as Joseph X did serve. The correlation might be one between the military and the militarization of prisons. Elijah Muhammad time for avoiding the draft. There is a way that military service is a specter and an apostrophe for the U.S. nation-state. This is appropriate for a moment when so many Black martial artists came from the military as discussed in the introduction. The military gave men like Robert F. Williams and Joseph X tools to rise up or organize. It also used them to kill others and then persecuted them for speaking out, killing its own former soldiers. In the end, military service could not equal freedom because to fight for the U.S. meant upholding structural white supremacy and systemic inequality. Thus, they are training themselves to protect their own "nation." You do not have to be in the military to recognize that you dissociate from it and need your own force that looks like it. So whereas "paramilitary" has been wielded against the FOI as a derogatory term, it is a historically rooted adjective that reflects the relationship between Black activists who are against U.S. militarism and military service, They are activists that the U.S. federal government motivates to create their own military-reminiscent units to demonstrate a desire for independence from a state that has failed to fight for equality.

1959, Malcolm X purportedly "commended the membership for displaying the splendid ability of Muslims to…carry out orders…at a moment's notice. He said that this among other reasons is why the white man and the government is becoming more and more afraid of [Elijah Muhammad's] program."[55] Because of the United States' racial injustice, Nation members refused to believe that they could be protected as U.S. citizens, driving them to imagine a force that excelled at unarmed community defense.[56]

In its nationally circulating briefs, the FBI frequently described the Fruit of Islam as "composed [of] all male, able-bodied members who participate in military drill and judo training."[57] The language occurred in dozens of files on Nation ministers during the 1950s and 1960s. The FBI shared the files internally as well as with the CIA and Secret Service. Malcolm X realized early on how dangerous the Fruit appeared to outsiders. He demonstrated this in the quote cited at the beginning of the chapter. As dangerous as it was perceived, martial arts training did more than just replicate military functions. It gave men power in a way they could feel through physical autonomy and self-determination. In February of 1957, Minister James 3X of Baltimore reportedly balked at how a white man could murder an African American and "walk up…the next block, lay down and fall asleep and nothing would happen to him."[58] But if the reverse occurred, "if a Negro as much as struck a white man in self-defense he would be jailed, and beaten."[59] What is remarkable about this statement is his use of the word "struck," which signifies unarmed self-defense and not armed retaliation. This type of statement hits at the heart of the immediate practicality of martial arts. The Nation of Islam did not teach its members

[55] Malcolm K. Little FBI File, New York Office, November 17, 1959.
[56] Raymond Sharrieff FBI File, Chicago Office, April 27, 1955, 2.
[57] For example, see James Russell McGregor, Memo, April 22, 1955, 2. Other examples can be found in files written by multiple offices over the 1950s and 1960s. Places they can be found in any given year include the Joseph Gravitt FBI file, the Malcolm K. Little FBI File, and James London FBI File.
[58] James Russell McGregor File, Baltimore Office, February 26, 1957, 6.
[59] James Russell McGregor File, Baltimore Office, February 26, 1957, 6.

unarmed self-defense in preparation to seek independence as a polity. It taught martial arts so Black men could feel agency over their bodies. Feeling a sense of bodily autonomy and power could be accomplished immediately, in contrast to the long-term ideal of securing a truly independent nation.

Martial arts lessons became central for this vision of embodiment and Black Power, especially since Elijah Muhammad forbade the Fruit from carrying guns. Though they trained to defend against weapons, Malcolm X reportedly said to the Fruit at New York's Temple #7 that:

> a follower of Mr. Muhammad does not walk with knives, guns, sticks or anything of the sort. He said when a man has no other protection but his hands then he should know how to protect himself with his hands. If a robber should break in your house, you should be able to take the gun or knife from the robber, and put it aside, and then take your bear [sic] hands and break his neck.[60]

Anything more than use of bare hands, such as "walk[ing] the street with a long knife or gun," denoted a "beast life" and not the life of an upright Nation man.[61] In other words, in order to "be clean inside and out," Nation men swore off alcohol, smoking, and gambling and swore to practice unarmed self-defense only.[62]

James 6X professed the same opinion when police arrested him while inviting people to the mosque in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in June 1964. He confessed in police interviews that the Nation prohibited violence and allowed members to "return violence used upon them" by "using only their bare fists."[63] Just a year prior to his arrest, an informant stated that James 6X found it

[60] Malcolm K. Little FBI File, New York Office, May 5, 1960.
[61] Malcolm K. Little FBI File, New York Office, May 5, 1960. So too did "attack[ing] your brother without a reason…drink[ing] the devil's whiskey, and beat[ing] your wife over."
[62] James London FBI File, Birmingham Office, December 17, 1963.
[63] See "James London FBI File, Birmingham Office, January 28, 1965. It is reported that, "on June 11, 1964 [James 6 is arrested] in front of a church in Tuscaloosa while inviting anyone to the Tuscaloosa temple that he had become responsible for." He is

humorous that "10 of us can scare the daylights of the Birmingham Police."[64] While his intention was to train men "to defend themselves so they would not be afraid," he knew his small congregation's legal practice of self-defense was considered a threat in the violent, Civil Rights Era South.[65]

In March 1965, Newark's James 3X also reiterated the Nation's philosophy on violence and self-defense. In interview printed in the *Patterson Evening News*, he remarked, "'Our policy toward violence is simple – we abhor it. But we won't stand idly by while our black brothers are being trampled on.'"[66] Using a gendered contrast, he acknowledged that Nation men learned "lessons in self-defense, how to get and keep a job, how to run a business, and the importance of frugality" while women learned household responsibilities.[67] It is within language like this that a purposefully defiant masculinity emerges that counted on physical and economic self-defense. In a powerful quote, James 3X argued, "'When a white man defends himself from attack, no one raises an eyebrow. But let a black man fight back and that's treason.'"[68] He and other Nation leaders understood that their insistence on learning unarmed-self-defense was seen as dangerously un-American.

Masculinized "judo" lessons continued to be a part of the Fruit of Islam's curriculum well into the late 1960s and 1970s. However, it is unclear how many chapters or instructors implemented actual judo training, even though FBI files labeled the lessons as such. Instructors

searched and jailed at the Tuscaloosa City Jail until June 15th. He is arrested in the wake of the 4 young Black Girls killed in Birmingham. Apparently he also said he would report anyone he knew being a part of "racial demonstrations" or participating in violence.

[64] James London FBI File, Birmingham Office, December 17, 1963.

[65] James London FBI File Birmingham Office, December 17, 1963. When James 6X is stopped and questioned on his activities, it is a year after the 16th Street Baptist church bombing that killed 4 young Black girls.

[66] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section D: Interview by Press, Newark Office, July 23, 1965.

[67] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section D: Interview by Press, Newark Office, July 23, 1965. The article is on page 54 of the *Paterson Evening News* and is entitled, "James 3X Says Muslims, When Attacked, Fight Back As One."

[68] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Section D: Interview by Press, Newark Office, July 23, 1965.

like Brooklyn's Moses Powell trained the Fruit in Japanese jujitsu. Others taught karate.[69] For law enforcement purposes, every martial art was likely collapsed into judo training given the primacy of judo when FBI surveillance began in the 1950s. But FBI agents did not need to accurately recognize specific martial arts to make a case for surveillance. One informant cried that the Fruit's training was not judo or martial arts at all, but in fact "foul play."[70] The term "foul play" may hint that some Fruit did not study technical, East Asian-descended martial artistry. If true, it would mean that localized training varied drastically from chapter to chapter. It would also signal that some chapters relied more on basic, American street fighting than any martial art. Regardless, the agent's use of "foul play" is important for another reason. It evoked fear. It did not matter which fighting style or method the Nation used. The Nation's bare fists represented an insidious threat, one whose unpatriotic, fighting embodiment represented a refusal to play fair if targeted by the government. While the fear of this so-called threat began with the Nation, it fed the decades long surveillance of Black martial artists, whether they were associated with a Black nationalist organization or not.[71]

III. "The Most Unprotected Person in America is the Black Woman": Nation Womanhood, Protection, and Unarmed Self-Defense

In a graphic published in the October 27, 1972 issue of *Muhammad Speaks*, a woman in a martial arts uniform and a black belt bemoans, "I had to learn to protect myself from the enemy until our Black men realize it's their duty" (See Figure 1-2).[72] She recalls her story with her fingers folded sheepishly in front of her. Behind her is a sign that comically says, "John's Karate

[69] See Allah, *The FOA Fighting of Allah.*
[70] Joseph Gravitt FBI File, New York Office, April 8th, 1960, 17.
[71] See Chapter 3 for testimony from the Black Karate Federation on how the FBI surveilled them. As mentioned in the Introduction, they were heavily influenced by the rhetoric of the Black Power Era. However, they had no formal connection to groups like the NOI or BPP and had no overt affiliations with leftist political groups.
[72] *Muhammad Speaks*, October 27th, 1972. The author is indebted to Russel Rickford for calling attention to this cartoon.

Academy," referencing a generic, American martial arts school. The cartoon acknowledges that women did not lack the capacity to defend themselves. But it aptly symbolizes an unwavering attitude of the Nation: Black women should be able to turn to Black men for protection.[73] Though published after the period this chapter focuses on, the cartoon succinctly encapsulates why the Nation only offered self-defense classes for men between 1955 and 1965. Both men and women wanted Black women to have the respect that allegedly came from aspiring to Victorian notions of gender, a belief that I explore more below.

Figure 1-37: Cartoon, *Muhammad Speaks,* October 27th, 1972, 2.

[73]It is interesting to note that if women executed martial arts in their Nation dress, it would have transgressed the organization's gender norms. Women were praised for wearing their approved, long, white, and "modest" attire. They served as symbols for the Nation's own version of modernity, which mostly rechecked beauty ideals of the time, including the popularity of makeup. For example, Malcolm X supposedly defended Nation women whose appearances turned heads as they walked down the street. They were seen as "crazy" and "unreal" in ways he deliberately claimed a "manish woman or a womanish man" would not. See Malcolm X FBI File, New York Office, January 31, 1956.

Books such as *Women of the Nation: Between Black Protest and Sunni Islam* (Gibson and Karim 2014) and *A Nation Can Rise No Higher than Its Women: African American Muslim Women in the Movement for Black Self Determination, 1950-1975* (Jeffries, 2015) have made important contributions to Nation scholarship. They emphasize that women were indispensable for the growth and sustainability of the organization.[74] Nevertheless, women fulfilled mostly distinct roles from men, reifying a heteronormative, gender binary. Men vowed to protect Black women as part of the guarantee of the Nation's patriarchal system. By training in various forms of self-defense and bonding over a nationalistic masculinity, men provided what literary scholar Farah Jasmine Griffin calls the "promise of protection."[75] Hence, women were not a part of the Nation's grassroots security apparatus. Griffin warns us to be critical when analyzing this protection, reminding us that it was not, in fact, a "progressive counter discourse" to misogynoir.[76] Yet the Nation appealed to many women because they believed that this promise of protection was groundbreaking, given the failure of the state and legal system to defend Black women from physical and sexual harm. Historian Ula Taylor argues that patriarchal authority was alluring because it encompassed the promise of respect and love in addition to protection. A "slippery slope [formed] between loving protection and the control of one's 'property'" that impacted women.[77] Protecting Black women's honor was a "life-changing espousal," and it "fueled [women's] dedication to a paternalistic movement."[78] Still, the work of Taylor and others reminds us to situate Nation women's deliberate choice to support patriarchy within the "context of the options available to them."[79]

[74] For example, see Jeffries, A *Nation Can Rise No Higher than Its Women*, 5.
[75] Griffin, "'Ironies of the Saint,'" 214.
[76] Griffin, "'Ironies of the Saint,'" 214.
[77] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 4.
[78] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 4.
[79] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy* 177.

It would be historically inaccurate to portray women as victims of patriarchal desire. As Dawn-Marie Gibson says,

> The NOI offered men and women a variety of incentives to join…[T]he Nation's structures did enable women to exercise leadership and authority... Scholars have traditionally neglected to consider the experiences and contributions that women made… Such neglect…appears to stem from a widely held, but nonetheless mistaken, belief that women were silent partners in the group.[80]

Building upon Taylor and Gibson, I contend women in the Nation acted strategically by remaining outside of martial arts spaces. Women optimized Nation men's anxiety over fostering a group that made Black women safer and decreased threats of racialized, sexualized violence. In fact, it is often discounted that "Women's accounts of the Nation of Islam vary, but generally they are far more positive than indicated" by critics.[81] While a historical approach to the Nation must critique the limits of patriarchy as a system of sociopolitical organization, determining what may have or have not been liberating for women requires careful historicization of their perspectives.

A December 1963 FBI report cited James 6X on this topic, claiming, "He advised that a Muslim man was willing to die for his woman."[82] At a 1964 Newark Human Rights Commission meeting, he pointedly remarked, "Negroes who can stand by when their women are dragged down the streets of Birmingham and say they are practicing nonviolence 'out [sic] to be dragged

[80] Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom,* 37. She also notes, "Underlying Muhammad's gender discourse was a belief that African American men would remain unequal to their white counterparts until they firmly exercised control over African American women."
[81] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 2. Gibson and Karim argue that: "Misperceptions of the Nation of Islam can be attributed to two factors: (1) that women's experiences have been presented and understood outside of historical context and (2) that a broad spectrum of women in the Nation of Islam have not been represented in their own voices."
[82] James London FBI File, Birmingham Office, December 17, 1963.

off the face of this earth."[83] The Nation's rhetoric around women was most memorably captured by Malcolm X at the 1962 funeral of Ronald Stokes, a Korean War veteran and mosque secretary killed by the L.A.P.D.[84] Malcolm insisted,

> The most disrespected woman in America, is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman…And as Muslims, the honorable Elijah Muhammed teaches us to respect our women, and to protect our women. And the only time a Muslim gets real violent, is when someone goes to molest his woman. We will kill you for our women…We believe that if the white man, will do whatever is necessary, to see that his woman gets respect and protection, then you and I will never be recognized as men until we stand up like men and place the same penalty over the head of anyone, who puts his filthy hands out, to put it in a direction of our women.[85]

Malcolm X's words captured the "slippery slope" of patriarchy and objectification that made men in the Nation control yet respect "our" women. But the constraints of the "promise of patriarchy" appealed to women who actively sought security and believed in the Victorian ideals of manhood and womanhood.[86] As Dawn Marie-Gibson reminds us about songstress and Nation member Etta James, she adored men "who made her 'feel safe,' and the Fruit of Islam constituted the epitome of protectors."[87]

Nation women of the mid-20th century lived three and four generations post-Emancipation. Jim Crow laws hindered their social and economic progress, and White

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[83] See James Russell McGregor FBI File, Newark Office, July 23, 1964. It includes a copy of the May 22nd, 1964 edition of the *Newark Evening News*." Within the paper is the article, "Tells Muslim Aims: James XXX Talks at Meeting Here" James XXX Talks at Meeting Here," by Douglas Eldridge.
[84] Clegg, *An Original Man*, 170.
[85] "Hon. Malcolm X: Los Angeles (Ronald Stokes Murder)," from the May 2, 1962 Malcolm X Speech at Ronald Stokes' Funeral Service, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_VI-iqOuRMo.
[86] For more information on her phrase the "promise of patriarchy," see Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*. For more on Victorian gender, womanhood, and how its addressed in the Nation, see Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 11-12.
[87] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 104.

supremacist terrorism endangered their physical safety. Women who entered the Nation enjoyed its "race-uplift and community-building messages" and "embraced the Nation's traditional gender roles given…American notions of respectability and economic advancement."[88] Black women had been denied protection dating back to slavery, when they often had little power to control when their bodies performed work or sex. Women chose the Nation of Islam "to undo the physical and psychological brutality of slavery" because they were still "haunted by its violence on their bodies, their families, and their institutions."[89] This is how even everyday acts of security, including escorts to drive women home, would have been welcome.[90] Concerns over women's "safety" ultimately created restrictions around women's movements, but prompted women to join the Nation, which many did independently and consensually.[91]

Women in the Nation internalized the conflation of respect and protection as a survival strategy. They delegated the responsibility of their protection elsewhere. They accepted conservative racial uplift to resist pernicious, slavery-era stereotypes that persisted.[92] Nation ideology countered gendered narratives that Black women did not need protection because they were immoral sexual deviants. But this approach "borrowed from the dominant ideology as it used women as a symbol of honor and an object of protection to assault the white race."[93] Usurping "white middle-class American values," Nation members heralded women as the "symbol of the Black race's purity and dignity."[94] Such ideologically conservative work had psychological benefits. Ruby Williams reflected on why she joined the Nation:

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[88] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 3.
[89] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 27.
[90] Joseph Gravitt FBI File, New York Office, January 11, 1963.
[91] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 1.
[92] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 27-28. In a much less productive way, even damaging stereotypes like the overwhelming and all-powerful Black "matriarch," as captured by E. Franklin Frazier and epitomized by Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report on Black families, came crashing down under the group's ideological framework where Black women could try to escape the violence of white men, domestic labor, and public consumption.
[93] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 28.
[94] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 30.

> it's a known fact that the black woman has had to work away from home from dawn… She has had to submit to the beast-like nature of men of all races regardless of her desires, and in most cases, her own man has been helpless to defend her...She has been unable to get substantial protection from any source and the least from the government under which she serves.[95]

Because of the historical lack of safety, the Nation seemed liked a space for respite, an imaginary of escape from violence. And whether radical or not, "one would be hard-pressed" to find another organization that "[kept] central and fundamental to its success the kind of protection" that Williams wanted.[96]

Men actualized the idea of protection with their bare hands.[97] In a 1957 incident in Flomaton, Alabama, a police officer harassed a Sister Ernestine Scott and a Sister Louise Dunlap, demanding they move from a white-only section on a train. Two Nation men from Florida, Minister Joe White and George Allen, saw the incident and responded. They "jumped [the officer] from behind and beat him with his own billy club" when he tried to move the women.[98] When fellow officers arrived at the scene, they arrested the men. Malcolm X used the event to flaunt how Nation men "wouldn't allow anybody to talk to his woman in the manner in which the white [officer] had spoken." He spun the story to say, "a fracas was started in which the black man disarmed the policeman."[99] This reclamation of manhood and protection, while generally supported by women, obfuscated women's bravery. Belonging to the Nation meant

[95] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 3. Taylor cites William's unpublished "A Fallen Star" in the "Subject Files" in The Malcolm X Collection: Papers, 1948–1965, at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.
[96] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 4-5.
[97] It is unconfirmed if the men discussed in this paragraph utilized martial arts, but they certainly did not use weapons to aid the women referenced.
[98] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 88.
[99] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 88. Taylor cites Malcolm X's FBI File.

being in a group that visibly put them in danger daily. This tension is important. Ula Taylor observes that,

> Sisters Ernestine and Louise, who felt entitled to sit where they pleased, became the object of the account. In effect, their female agency was usurped by men. Although the women were no doubt questioned by someone in the NOI about what had happened, they too may have agreed to privilege the men's actions above their own given the emphasis on the defense of black womanhood.[100]

Despite not physically fighting the officer, their refusal to move their bodies was as physically defiant as the men's performance of unarmed self-defense. The diminishment of their roles in the situation demonstrates the limits of protection and removes their bodies from their own protest.

For some women, the Nation protected them from "being a piece of meat in the streets," but overall the group had a mixed track record with intimate partner violence. [101] A Sister Sandra recalled that if "a man took advantage, abused his wife or someone in the community, they would literally give him a thrashing."[102] In 1956, Malcolm X punished Joseph X for beating his wife. Joseph X was a self-defense instructor for the group and notably served as a captain for the Fruit of Islam in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.[103] Malcolm suspended Joseph X from attending temple for 90 days, a punishment notably less severe than the punishment for having premarital sex.[104] Another woman, Sister Michelle, believed that the Nation ignored domestic

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[100] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 90. For more on the South and safety, see Gibson and Karim 60. Sister Ana Karim decided to leave SNCC in part due to interracial relations between black men and white women, but also in part due to the racial violence that almost ended her life while doing voter registration work.
[101] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 51.
[102] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 56. Sandra was interviewed by Gibson and Karim. Sandra is a pseudonym and no last name is provided. I have called her "Sister Sandra" to avoid the awkwardness of simply referring to her as Sandra. I make a similar decision with Michelle in a subsequent sentence.. Even when punished, assault lent itself to a broader culture of physical violence. According to an FBI informant, Malcolm X "stated that there is a rule among Muslims that if anyone should strike their women the one that strikes should be made so that he will not be able to strike another." See Malcolm K. Little, aka Malik El-Shabazz, FBI File, New York Office, November 17, 1959.
[103] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*. Joseph X is also known as Joseph Gravitt and later became known as Yusuf Shah.
[104] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 97.

violence claims and trusted a man's "word [taken] over a woman's."[105] Regardless of their outcomes, these cases indicated that the desire "to 'protect and 'control' women were read by some [Nation] men as sanctioning women's sub-ordination."[106] There is no evidence to suggest that unarmed self-defense increased the occurrences of this messy patriarchal contradiction. However, martial arts training, while a tool for self-defense and empowerment, was practiced both by men who respected others' bodies and by men who committed sexual assault.[107]

Nonetheless, women were not excluded from the physical culture of The Nation.[108] Their new Nation membership required it. Women adhered to their own exercise routines in the Muslim Girl Training corps (MGT). The MGT replicated a military structure with officers like the Fruit. This military orientation, while not including martial arts, purported a different vision of womanhood. MGT training included calisthenics and military drill, making them participants in Black women's fitness culture of the early and mid-20th century.[109] The MGT predated women's drill squads established by groups like the Black Panther Party. Thus, though women and girls did not participate in community defense, their membership still relied upon the acceptance of a gendered bodily regiment. The Nation called upon the MGT to "make all women and girls…brave fighters and willing at any time to give their life for Allah's sake," an exact

[105] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 55-56. Again, Michelle is also a pseudonym.
[106] Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 56.
[107] It is important to note that my argument is not that martial arts makes men more violent. My argument is that despite its philosophical training, it does not automatically prevent its practitioners from participating in sexual assault. It is does not automatically undo patriarchal tendencies that claim this is appropriate. And while I note that it is a contradiction to want to protect women but also strike them, I mean that is a contradiction in general while still coherent within the function of patriarchy.
[108] Overall, the Nation stated: "From a material as well as a spiritual point of view, Islam recognizes the position of the woman to be the same as that of the man...She can earn money and own property just as a man can do and therefore she may, if she need, follow any profession. " This rhetoric was meant to contrast the inequality seen between genders in Christianity. See The Religion of Islam: Marriage, Religious Teachings and Prayers Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[109] For more on Black women's participation in fitness and physical culture in the 20th century, see the scholarship of historians like Ava Purkiss, Purkiss, Ava, "'Beauty Secrets: Fight Fat': Black Women's Aesthetics, Exercise, and Fat Stigma, 1900–1930s," *Journal of Women's History* 29, no. 2 (2017): 14–37, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2017.0019.

echo of its call to the Fruit quoted earlier.[110] The women's brand of "fighter" was fit, religious, and proficient in homemaking, supposedly forging a fight in spaces different from men.[111] Because of their beliefs, Nation women invested in a femininity that forewent learning unarmed self-defense in order to accept a classed, racialized sense of protection.

IV. Unarmed Self-Defense and an Unarmed Nation: Dissecting Law Enforcement Surveillance of the Nation

The interstate, interorganizational spying that targeted the Nation of Islam for the duration of the 20th century was expansive. According to Taylor, "the NOI gained a reputation as a radical organization because that was how the criminal justice system viewed it. Since the 1930s, the FBI and police departments in Detroit and Chicago had kept the temples under surveillance."[112] Both men and women suffered harassment and jailing between the 1940s and 1960s.[113] In a letter addressed to President Kennedy dated February 16th, 1963, Malcolm X inquired about an FBI arrest of a Minister and 12 Muslims in Rochester, New York the week prior. Officers had "forced" their way into temple service. They stated that they had received an anonymous tip that an attendee was carrying a gun, yet the officers never searched for one.[114] Furiously but calmly, Malcolm X expressed to Kennedy's administration that "an explosive current is building up in the negro community against these police-state conditions."[115]

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[110] Elijah Muhammad, Instructions to the M.G.T., Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[111] However, the military nature of the MGT would come at a cost for women of all ages, who depending on their female captain, could receive unsolicited home visits that inspected the cleanliness of their household. This punished those who did not meet the standards, even those with more difficult or stressful family lives. See Gibson and Karim, *Women of the Nation*, 48.
[112] Taylor, *The Promise of Patriarchy*, 106.
[113] The Nation's population fluctuated over the years, particularly after Elijah Muhammad was incarcerated. It rose again significantly when charismatic leaders such as Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan began preaching. See texts such as Gibson and Karim 9-10, *Women of the Nation*. It is important to note that Clara Muhammad also effectively led the organization while Muhammad was incarcerated during the 1940s. See Gibson, *History of the Nation of Islam*, 32.
[114] Malcolm X to John F. Kennedy, 16 February 1963, reel 3, The Malcolm X Collection: Papers, 1948-1965 (Bulk 1961-1964), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[115] Malcolm X to John F. Kennedy, reel 3, 16 February 1963, The Malcolm X Collection: Papers, 1948-1965 (Bulk 1961-1964), Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

Law enforcement used the Nation's rhetoric in response to these conditions as justification to further surveil the Nation and identify it as a threat.[116] Fearing the "explosive current," law enforcement tracked martial arts practice by circulating federal and local briefs. A notable one was created by the San Diego Police. On May 7, 1962, Raymond Sharrieff, the national, Supreme Captain of the Fruit of Islam, sent followers sheets from the San Diego Academy Training Bulletin. It painted an aggressive image of the Nation, rooted deeply in Cold War anxieties over Black radicalism and internationalism. Sharrieff astutely realized that the "intelligence bulletin" was meant to "make the Police very hostile and belligerent in their contact with Muslims."[117] To legitimate their surveillance, law enforcement agencies only needed to argue that the Nation was capable of violence. While characterizing "Islam as a recognized and respected religion," the bulletin racialized the Nation of Islam as a "pseudo-religious organization whose creed [was] the annihilation of the white man and the Negro non-conformist."[118] Though the San Diego Police had almost no "incidents" or run-ins with the Nation, they asserted that "any organization that advocates racial hatred must provide violence and action to satisfy the appetite of its members and to stimulate its program."[119] Tracked by programs like the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO), the Nation experienced investigations that scanned their Black Power rhetoric for proof of self-defense advocacy. A troubling moment in the San Diego memo revealed how the police thought self-defense practice incited violence and revolution:

[116] It is important to note that activists like Malcolm X used before the term's contemporary popularity.
[117] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[118] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. Interestingly, the denial of the Nation's religious nature enabled the police to claim a "detachment from political, racial and religious" profiling.
[119] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.

> The nucleus of the Nation of Islam is comprised of 20 to 30-year-old men called 'the Fruit of Islam.' These men are selected for their physical prowess and are adept for their aggressive tactics and judo. They are almost psychotic in their dedication and hatred of Caucasians and are comparable to the Mau Mau or Kamikaze in their dedication and fanaticism. It has been reported that many temples have gun clubs in which this militant group is trained in weapons. It has also been reported that gun sales have noticeable increased in the Negro communities of Los Angeles. It has been stated locally that the members of this cult will kill any police officer when the opportunity presents itself, regardless of the circumstance or outcome. Negro police officers are not immune to this threat.[120]

Here, Cold War anxieties played a large role in the law enforcement imaginary. The invocation of Japanese suicide pilots, the Kamikaze, illustrated a fear of people of color who rejected U.S. supremacy and exposed the fallibility of the U.S. As noted, early comments from the Nation showed mild admiration for Japan during World War II. The reference to the Kenyan Mau Mau Uprising reflected the power of anticolonial movements during the Cold War Period. It is perhaps because the Mau Mau did not "succeed" in their revolution, that the police compared the Nation to them.[121] But unlike these "counterparts," there is no evidence that the Nation practiced armed tactics. There is also insufficient evidence to suggest that the Nation's physical training program increased the "physical prowess" of its members in a way that would prepare them for war. Even the altercations that happened with police, including the Alabama train incident mentioned above, were cases of reactive community defense and not acts of revolution.[122]

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[120] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[121] Because even though "unsuccessful," it was a significant shock to colonial powers and the governments they backed.
[122] According to the same bulletin, other Nation disturbances in California involved nonviolent intervention during sheriff eviction attempts, but no violence.

Despite the San Diego brief's insinuations, assertions that the Fruit used martial arts as well as "knives and blackjacks, and [the] Springfield rifle" are unsupported.[123] This did not prevent the San Diego report from recommending that officers "request 'back-up' on any investigation or police incident involving a possible MUSLIM, regardless of how trivial the incident."[124] Going further, it stated: "as a police officer you are confronted with many hazards and dangers; however, it should be stressed that any contact with the Muslim cult should be [entered with] caution."[125] However, the Fruit were routinely told to obey the police, making noncompliance infrequent. And when it did occur, Elijah Muhammad sternly reprimanded it.[126]

In briefs on Nation leaders such as Raymond Sharrieff, the FBI only needed hints to substantiate the resources poured into Nation detail. Sharrieff's 1955 file argued that he should be spied on because he captained the Fruit and had been convicted for violating the Selective Services Act.[127] Without evidence, the FBI "considered [him] an individual who would be likely to commit acts inimical to the national defense and public safety of the United States in time of emergency."[128] James 3X's May 1965 file flagged him for surveillance because in "his position as Minister he controls the activities of many NOI members and he might reasonably be expected to direct them to commit acts of violence in a time of national emergency."[129] Out of the roughly 23 Fruit of Islam meetings that the FBI surveilled at Mosque #7 between March and

[123] See Raymond Sharrieff FBI File, memorandum, Chicago Office, October 22, 1953. In fact, in hundreds of pages of reviewed FBI files, the author found no mentions that suggested a federal agent or police officer had witnessed arms training, let alone heard it verbally confirm that such classes existed.
[124] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[125] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[126] Elijah Muhammad to Minister Jeremiah X, 28 April 1959, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York. In the letter, Muhammad he tells NOI members in Florida to not resist arrests.
[127] Raymond Sharrieff FBI File, Chicago Office, May 27, 1955. In the file, the act referenced is the "SSA of 40." Given the context, the author infers that the Selective Service Act is being referenced. The other act that it could be, the Social Security Act, but it does not fit the context.
[128] Raymond Sharrieff FBI File, Chicago Office, May 27, 1955.
[129] See FBI files such as the James Russell McGregor File, cover page, Newark Office, February 5, 1965. The FBI term word for flagging him was called "Detcom tabbing." The same language is used for his file dated July 22, 1965.

November 1961, 11 were self-defense classes. Instruction in these classes included defense against knife attacks taught by Captain Joseph X.[130] In the absence of arms training, martial arts training became crucial evidence of political insurgency that law enforcement agencies could track. Overall, local police and national agencies looked for the Nation to prove a commitment to violence, yet they lacked enough evidence to "combat the organization" or accuse it of violating more "sedition laws."[131]

Paradoxically, martial artistry had become a strategy for the Nation to achieve Black self-defense without coming into deadly conflict with law enforcement. The FBI may have sneered that the Nation was "pseudo" religious, but its Islamic values stopped it from fighting the state, repeatedly espousing how God would destroy the U.S. so its members did not need to.[132] As reported to special agents who stopped him, James 6X mentioned that, "Muhammad teaches non-violence and respect for authority."[133] He said he had "never heard of any of the speakers…make derogatory remarks about the United States Government or the flag of the United States."[134] Instances where the Nation "respected" law enforcements should not be surprising. Certain strands of conservative Black nationalism involved obeying police. The Nation's deferral to police was rooted in a strategy to stay safe. In a very tense, contradictory way, the Nation tried to walk a line of critiquing the U.S. without needlessly flouting federal law.

Even though the government remained antagonistic to Nation martial artistry, it is possible that unarmed self-defense and obedience to law enforcement allowed the Nation to exist for as many decades as it did. Their refusal to advertise or promote training in armed self-defense

[130] Joseph Gravitt FBI File 1961, New York Office, January 23, 1962.
[131] Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[132] See Raymond Sharrieff, letter, 7 May 1962, Instructions to Laborers FOI and MGT Folder, Nation of Islam Collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York.
[133] James London, memorandum, Atlanta Office, March 25, 1966.
[134] James London FBI File, memorandum, Birmingham Office, March 25, 1966.

notably sets them aside from groups like the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. Oddly, the Nation's usage of martial arts was police compliant. They avoided some of the trouble that accompanied carrying weapons in cities. Their nationwide training never attempted to arm the Fruit. Given how hard repression occurred against armed struggle, trying to avoid unnecessary law enforcement was a theoretically sound strategy. However, any plan to control or diminish interactions with police failed. The Nation experienced countless instances of abuse at the hands of police. Interactions ranged from police harassing men selling *Muhammad Speaks* on the streets of New York and Los Angeles to wanton, state-sanctioned murder.[135] The Ronald Stokes case was one such incident. Mentioned above, his funeral allowed Malcolm to discuss protecting women, but the language was ironic. Stokes died a grisly death, shot in the back by an LAPD bullet during a raid on Mosque #27. Officers beat and severely injured several other members in the process.[136] It was not enough that the Nation was careful about obeying the law or that it refused to let members carry weapons. The threat of their bodies, even unarmed, sufficed for government repression. Though it espoused platitudes like, "A wise man avoids trouble, never attacks unless attacked physically," the Nation could not escape the government's fear of Black self-determination and self-defense.[137]

V. Conclusion

Malcolm X delivered one of his most influential speeches, "The Ballot or the Bullet," on March 8th, 1964 in Washington Heights, New York, shortly after his formal departure the Nation of Islam.[138] Malcolm X conveyed his post-NOI attitude method of organizing. He spent the

[135] Curtis IV, Black *Muslim Religion in the Nation of Islam, 1960-1975*, 118.
[136] Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention.*
[137] Malcom K. Little FBI File, New York Office, January 31, 1956.
[138] This version differs from the more famous version that has been canonized in *Malcolm X Speaks*, which was edited by George Breitman. The versions of the speeches in the book are some of, if not the most, cited versions. Historian Garrett Felber, phone conversation with author, 2019 and Historian Stephen Ward, email message to author, 2020.

speech encouraging voting as a political bullet. He sought to galvanize Black people to vote in the upcoming Presidential election between President Johnson and the Republican nominee, Barry Goldwater.[139] In one moment, he exclaimed:

> If you're interested in freedom, you need some judo, you need some karate--you need all the things that will help you fight for freedom. If we don't resort to the bullet, then immediately we have to take steps to use the ballot. Equality of opportunity, if the constitution at the present time [doesn't offer it], then change it. You don't need a debate. You don't need a filibuster. You need some action![140]

Again, Malcolm X did not advocate violence, but urged African Americans to get involved and to push for "the strongest civil-rights bill they ever passed."[141] His martial arts reference then served him multiple times over. It encouraged listeners to get involved through practical means and to do so by staying both safe and spiritually and physically formidable. As he stated earlier in the address, "You and I need something right now that's going to benefit all of us. That's going to change the community in which we live, not try to take us somewhere else."[142] Unarmed self-defense practice could serve Black communities as they made more breakthroughs in electoral politics, as the Congress of African People would prove just four years later. For Malcolm, the Black Freedom Movement could not survive without it. And if the organizing strategy he promoted did not work, martial arts training would also ironically support his undesired outcome: revolution, political upheaval, and the bullet.

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[139] For more on the speech and its relationship to 1964's political moment, see Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.
[140] Malcolm X, "Ballot or Bullet," Washington Heights, NY, March 29, 1964, https://genius.com/Malcolm-x-ballot-or-the-bullet-washington-heights-ny-march-29-1964-annotated. This line is not in the *Malcolm X Speaks* version, which is probably the most likely reason is it lesser known. Stephen Ward, email message to author, 2020. Ward notes that it was common to tweak speeches for different venues while still keeping its core arguments.
[141] X, "Ballot or Bullet." For more on motivations behind and goals of the speech, see Marable, *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention*.
[142] [142] X, "Ballot or Bullet."

Malcolm X distinguished himself as an independent leader in "The Ballot or the Bullet," but the mentions of martial arts still related him to his Nation roots. During the 1950s and 1960s, he and other leaders helped forge the Nation's martial artistry. This martial artistry worked in conjunction with the Nation's internal and public agenda even after his exit. On May 22nd, 1964, when James 3X appeared at the meeting of the Newark Human Rights Commission, he shared the microphone with Mayor Hugh J. Addonizio. After his remarks, an angry white man rose from his seat. Opposing James 3X's words, the man advanced toward the minister, but could not push his way through. Six members of the Fruit of Islam "sprang to their feet and formed a protective ring around their leader."[143] The Fruit learned the confidence and training to defend ministers in such situations in their security and martial arts trainings. If the man had posed a greater threat, they would have been able to dispatch him using control techniques from class. Even if they had been trained in gun techniques, it would have been dangerous to the organization's future to use them in the middle of a city commission meeting. Thus, by the mid-1960s, martial arts practice manifested itself into a practical organizing tool, keeping Nation of Islam advocates safer in public. Instead of aiding a theoretical Nation of Islam revolution, as the government suspected, martial arts let the Nation fight with its words.

After Malcolm X was expelled from the Nation and formed his own organizations, the Muslim Mosque Inc. and the Organization of Afro American Unity, he maintained his belief in self-defense as a right and as a necessity for survival. The Nation also continued its usage into the mid-1970s. The group and its former minister influenced other groups. Organizations such as the Us, the Congress of African People, the Republic of New Afrika, the Revolutionary Action Movement, and the Black Panther Party all created their own relationship to martial arts. The

[143] James Russell McGregor FBI File, Newark Office, July 23, 1964.

subsequent generation of Black Power activists often cited interactions with or time in the Nation as part of their engagement with martial arts.[144]

The believability of its performance of martial arts made the organization a target. In Nation member files, agents begrudgingly admitted they could not furnish reports of true national threats, only the fear of such. FBI agents reported violent rhetoric when they could, but their reports constantly noted how ministers preached nonviolence and accordance with the law. Still, incendiary indictments of U.S. racism and martial arts practice fueled state apprehensions of the Nation.[145] Law enforcement agencies wielded "judo" practice as an indication that the Nation would act on its separatist language. Historian Garrett Felber astutely notes that "ongoing state violence requires an ideological apparatus to legitimize it."[146] In other words, it was strategic for the state to differentiate between its "legitimate" expressions of violence, like Ronald Stokes' murder, and "illegitimate" ones, such as Black practices of "organized self-defense, including judo."[147] As implausible as it became that the Nation would ever wage armed struggle, martial arts and the fathomability of armed revolution became scapegoats to justify long term monitoring.[148]

Though the Nation's martial artistry seemed radical to law enforcement and non-Muslims, it was not necessarily revolutionary. In tandem with its adoption of Victorian gender norms, the Nation's reproduction of a security apparatus was a conservative nation-building

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[144] See Chapter 2 for more.
[145] From a November 19th, 1958 meeting, an FBI agent reported, "the Moslems do not carry firearms or knives, but he will not promise anyone that they will not start in the future when the time comes." See James Russel McGregor FBI File, Baltimore Office, February 26, 1959. Also, in a February 22nd, 1960 meeting, a minister reportedly said, "'We have no arms to protect our leader, that we carry no knives, no weapons whatsoever.'" He then demonstrated that he is quite an expert in judo.
[146] Felber, *Those Who Know Don't Say*, 155. For more on ideological and repressive state apparatuses, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in the Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Jeffrey J. Williams, etc. all. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).
[147] Felber, *Those Who Know Don't Say*, 155.
[148] The absurdity of state surveillance is even greater when one considers that prominent Brooklyn instructor Moses Powell taught Japanese jujitsu not only to the Fruit but also to the Secret Service and D.E.A. during his life.

project. As early as the 19th century, Black leaders prioritized an orderly, prepared, and disciplined masculinity in many conservative racial uplift projects.[149] The Nation never critiqued its own inheritance of these ideologies and the masculinity and femininity they fostered. Like its other tactics, martial arts training supported conservative gender roles. In the end, the Nation's organizing and gender doctrines rested upon the ability of responsible men to protect the organization without knives and guns. As a result, it also rested upon the conformity, loyalty, and sacrifice that the unarmed self-defense training helped reinforce.

[149] For more on the influence of conservative gender ideas on racial uplift in the 19th century, see scholarship by Michele Mitchell, Kevin Gaines, Wilson Moses, and Winston James for more on the influence of conservative gender ideas on racial uplift in the 19th century.

CHAPTER 2:

"Let Black People understand that they are the lovers and the sons of lovers and warriors": CAP, CFUN, and Martial Arts as Black Arts and Nationalist Education

When a contingent of activists began a study group at the Aquarian bookstore in Los Angeles in the fall of 1965, they unknowingly laid the foundation for martial arts training for Pan-African activists across the country. Figures such as Haiba Karenga, Hakim Jamal, Dorothy Jamal, Tommy Jacquette-Mfikiri, and Karl Key-Hekima gathered around a UCLA graduate named Maulana Karenga.[1] Karenga studied theories on socialism, nationalism, and Black liberation from African postcolonial leaders including Kenya's Jomo Kenyatta, Senegal's Leopold Senghor, and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere. He learned Swahili, and, like a strand of African activists, believed its "transnationalness" could politically and economically unite Black peoples.[2] Using this shared approach, his study group established the "US" organization and devised "Kawaida." Kawaida developed as a cultural and political framework and ideology. Its central aim was to achieve Black Power and liberation in the United States.[3] Other "neo-Pan-Africanists," who fused Pan Africanist thought with 1960s Black cultural nationalism, widely

[1] Scot Brown. *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 38.
[2] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 22.
[3] The organization's name comes from the idea that group would organize for the benefit of Black people ("US") rather than for the benefit of white people ("them"). For more, see Brown 38.

used Kawaida.[4] It revolved around US's Seven Principles of Blackness, or "Nguzo Saba": Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).[5] Between 1966 and 1968, Kawaida rose to prominence among Karenga's contemporaries at the National Black Power Conferences, heavily influencing tactics employed by Black Power advocates across the country. By 1970, 3000 Black people, whose roots lay across the diaspora, convened in Atlanta to found the Congress of African People (CAP). [6] Though interpersonal and inter-movement disputes prevented US from joining it, US's usage of martial arts as part of Black self-determination and self-defense impacted CAP agenda's nationwide.

US's young men's group, the Simba Wachanga or "Young Lions," created a rubric for CAP's martial artistry [7] As part of the US's training, the Simba Wachanga, considered the "paramilitary wing," received training from military veterans such as Samuel Carr-Damu and Oliver Heshimu. Carr-Damu had likely been an officer during his time in the Korean War and he focused on drills and militaristic movement. By 1968, the Simba's training mandated two hours of martial arts instruction on Mondays and Tuesdays under men like Jomo Shambuli, who acted like generals even with no military experience. Martial arts comprised a piece of the Kawaida curriculum, which comprised first-aid, rifle training, and brotherhood building activities like horseback riding. [8] Martial arts skills and overall confidence aided members who protected

[4] See Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 131. Rickford says that "Pan-African nationalism" of the Black Power Era was considered "Neo-Pan Africanism."
[5] Kwasi Konadu, *A View from the East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009), 87 and Algernon Austin, *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 101. For more information on how Kawaida spread to other Pan-African activists, notably in the Congress of African People, see Brown, *Fighting for US*; Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017);
[6] Komozi Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 162.
[7] For information on "Simba Wachanga" and its meaning, see Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation* and Brown, *Fighting for US*.
[8] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 40 and 52-55.

Maulana Karenga and took part in "underground guerrilla activities against government authorities and private institutions."[9]

In this chapter, I investigate how CAP martial arts instructors were influenced by Kawaida, and I assess how martial arts aided the organization's nationalist goals. I focus on CAP rather than on US because CAP showcases how Kawaidist approaches to martial arts spread out in a multiple chapter organization. Likewise, studying CAP showcases how, alongside literary and visual culture, martial artistry and physical culture co-created an expansive philosophy about community engagement and art. Martial arts emerged in the organization in neo-Pan-African and Black Arts performances, in liberation schooling, and in print culture. because. For CAP, martial arts instruction aided two central goals: 1) carving out a distinct cultural identity within a national, anti-Black climate and 2) educating students on how to develop a mind, body, and spirit connection. Practitioners thought incorporating martial artistry would increase mental and physical confidence and provide the spiritual resiliency necessary to live as activists.

I historicize accounts of martial arts organizing in Newark and Camden, New Jersey and Brooklyn, New York by utilizing oral histories, primary school lesson plans, and print culture. I use these sites as case studies because of the significant amount of evidence for their martial arts programs. Collectively, their interconnectedness and meticulous development allow us to think about broader trends in Black Power and martial artistry. I explore instructors' views on Black Liberation through the organizing goals of personal and cultural growth and community development and preparedness.

[9] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 52 and photography page 10.

In spite of the scope of CAP's national organizing and impact, few texts give the organization serious consideration. Komozi Woodard's *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics*, published in 1998, was the first book to treat the Congress of African People as one of the era's most important political and cultural organs. *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, the US Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (2005) by Scot Brown contextualized CAP's outgrowth from Karenga's US organization and its "transnationalism." Kwasi Konadu treated CAP's birth in New York City within a larger Black Power and Black Independent Education movement in Brooklyn in *A View from the East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York City* (2009). Both *A View from the East* and *Achieving Blackness: Race, Black Nationalism, and Afrocentrism in the Twentieth Century* (Austin 2006) discuss the vibrancy of martial arts education in CAP curriculum. Several texts in the 2010s revisited discusses of CAP. *Amiri Baraka and the Congress of African People: History and Memory* (Simanga 2015) revived the expansiveness of the organization's practice and its long history, including its relationship to the complex relationship between Black racial politics and Marxism. Russell Rickford critically located CAP's schools within national imaginings of Black liberation, schooling, and Pan Africanism in *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (2016). Though each of these examines women's role within CAP, no full-length study centered the group's gender praxis as an intellectual history until Ashley Farmer's *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017). Farmer's work interrogates how women roles in CAP's ideologies changed dynamically overtime, shifting them from various identities such as "African" women to "Pan-African" women. In similar ways, I pay attention to the ways in which analyzing martial

arts practice complicates our understanding of CAP's gender politics and creates a more complete picture of the organization.[10]

I explore activists in this chapter who experienced overlaps in their approaches to Black Power as well as ruptures and disagreements. Activists united under the umbrella of the Congress of African People, but most had already formed local associations with their own ideological goals and internal issues. For example, CAP in Newark grew out of the Committee for a Unified Newark (CFUN) and, in Brooklyn, CAP grew out of the East organization, whose martial arts education far outlived its time as "CAP Brooklyn." What connects the actors in this chapter is their shared commitment to cultural nationalism, application of Kawaida principles, and investment in Pan-Africanist principles. Their Pan-Africanism was deeply rooted in a critique of European colonialism in Africa. They believed African-Americans were "Africans" and "colonial subjects" in the United States. Rather than just support African independence movements, they organized to form a "nation" themselves. And though their visions of an African nation in the U.S. was not geographically contiguous, the nation they sought to build required holistic safety to free itself from U.S. social and legal oppression.

I. Before the Congress: Political Mobilization, Black Arts, and the Way of the Warrior in Newark

In Newark, the Committee for a Unified NewArk (CFUN) preceded CAP. While CFUN's Black Arts developments have greatly informed how we tell the history of Black nationalist organizing in late 1960s Newark, CFUN's martial arts program has been overlooked.[11] However,

[10] New dissertations and articles in this area continue to come out, including Janée Moses' dissertation, "A House to Sing in: Extraordinary/ordinary Black Women's Narratives about Black Power" (2020).
[11] For example, see William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Woodard, *Nation within a Nation.*

martial arts practice both increased Black Arts activity within CFUN and provided a practical form of self-defense when guns were impractical and escalatory. Not only did it intertwine aesthetic and political liberation, martial arts practice centered spiritual consciousness and physical well-being as forms of Black liberation.

On June 21st, 1968, upon the heels of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, a politically conscious group of Black men named the United Brothers convened the Newark Black Political Convention. Led by Kasisi Mhisani (Harold Wilson), they aimed to use the 1968 special election for city council as preparation to elect a Black mayor in the 1970 mayoral race. After advocating for their cause at the 1968 Black Power Conference in Philadelphia, activist-artist Amiri Baraka won support for the Brother's candidates. The Black Power Conference network lent resources and human power to the campaign. Under the guidance of Karenga, multiple organizations united to form the Committee: the United Brothers; Amiri Baraka's Spirit House Movers and Players; the Black Community Defense and Development; Amina Baraka's the United Sisters; and the Sisters of Black Culture.[12] CFUN based its organizing on issues raised at the Black Power conferences, emphasizing the redistribution of city resources, the improvement of health services, housing, and the advancement of Black political agency. They designed the resulting "Peace and Power" campaign to prioritize black voter registration and to compete with Italian Americans and other groups who had gained influence in city government.[13]

Baraka invested in both the arts and politics, unwilling to separate them as discrete forms of Black nationalist practice. Despite its breadth, he and Larry Neal largely receive credit for spearheading the Black Arts Movement (BAM). Scholars such as James Smethurst posit the Black Arts Movement as an independent, heterogeneous movement and not a "wing" of the

[12] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*,107 and Woodard, *Nation within a Nation*, 101-104.
[13] See Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 84-113.

Black Power Movement. BAM made "artistic activity…an absolute priority and linked [it] to the equally emphatic drive for the development and exercise of black self-determination within a black political-cultural movement in the United States."[14] With his wife Amina Baraka, Amiri Baraka formed a repertory collective called the Spirit House Movers and Players in 1965. They performed Black Arts poetry and plays around the nation and established their base in Newark's Central Ward at the Spirit House where the Barakas lived.[15] They chose the name Spirit House "to move people's spirits and to function as integrally in the life of the community as a grocery store."[16] Spirit House existed within a network of Black Arts formations in Newark including the periodicals *Black NewArk, Unity and Struggle,* and *Cricket*.[17] CFUN used these affiliated arts groups to disseminate its "culture and communications."[18]

Due to simultaneous, artistic output throughout Black America, a new "Black art" drove BAM's momentum. In his titular poem "Black Art," Baraka called for art with power, art that produced change, and artists who were willing to write and affect that change it. Arguing that art arms people with tools to combat systemic injustice, Baraka theorized that an authentic "Black" artist equips people to grapple with individuals who represent a violent American system and state.[19] Though Baraka essentialized "Black" and "Black art" by limiting their scope and inclusiveness, he set an agenda for Black artists in the poem by politicizing both

[14] James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 16. For more, see Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Crawford, "Introduction," in *New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement*, ed. by Lisa Gail Collins and Margo Crawford (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008).
[15] See Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 70 and 85.
[16] Harry Justin Elam, *Taking It to the Streets: The Social Protest Theater of Luis Valdez and Amiri Baraka*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 30.
[17] See Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation* and Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, for more.
[18] Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*, 110.
[19] Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," 302-303.

identities. By figuratively bringing "fire…to whities ass," art could convince its audience that they could organize and fight back.[20]

In one verse, Baraka declares, "Let Black people understand/That they are the lovers and the sons/Of warriors and sons/Of warriors Are poems & poets."[21] By raising the idea of warriorhood, Baraka wedded art to conflict and claimed an African warrior inheritance for Black American activist and artists. Though he never explicitly mentioned martial arts, Baraka's repeated usage of the term "warrior" suggests a relationship between aesthetics, self-determination, and self-defense. Martial artists are precisely warrior-artists, aesthetically trained in combat arts.

There are examples to connect the "warriorhood" in his vision of the Black artist to a history of "martial arts" usage within African Diasporic cultures and resistance. Historian T.J. Desch-Obi explains how West and West Central African martial arts made their way across the Atlantic Ocean. Distant relatives of the Angolan foot-fighting art engolo "spread into the Americans under the name 'knocking and kicking' in north America, *jogo de capoeira* in Brazil, and danmyé in Martinique."[22] In the former Biafran region and Angola, martial arts were used "as a form of entertainment when practiced to music, a form of dueling to settle personal scores, a ritualized form of conflict resolution, or a form of battlefield training for young soldiers."[23] From Obi's perspective, "the importance of following these African martial arts into the Americas" can be seen when recognizing their cultural significance in "community…rituals" as well as in combat.[24] Combat usage can be seen across the 19th century, from Revolutionary Haiti, where Black "bondsman…may have relied on previous military experience and their stick- and

[20] Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," 302.
[21] Amiri Baraka, "Black Art," 303.
[22] T. J. Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor: The History of African Martial Art Traditions in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2008), 2.
[23] Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor*, 11.
[24] Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor*, 12.

machete-fighting arts," to Brazil, where capoeira experts fought "for honor within the confines of bondage."[25]

Thus, more than figurative language for CFUN, implementing political and cultural organizing became a signifier of their warriorhood inheritance and a gesture toward African cultural retention. CFUN martial arts instruction produced a Black aesthetic movement practice at a time when arts like judo and karate were seen in YMCAs solely as sport and fitness. The Black Arts Movement "initiated a turning point in the consciousness and self-determination of numerous young Black artists across the country" and "created a "Black Aesthetic" that would expand the scope and expression of Black martial culture. Though scholars have explored the Black Arts Movement (BAM) and the role of art in political and cultural organizing in texts like *The Black Arts Movement (Smethurst 2005), New Thoughts on the Black Arts Movement (Collins, Crawford 2006),* and *Black Arts West (Widener 2009),* works on martial arts as artistic productions connected to the Black Arts Movement are scant.

Shaha Mfundishi Maasi, a member of CFUN's Black Community Defense and Development collective (BCD), brought the legacy of Black Diasporic martial arts and warriorhood to Newark. As an instructor, he linked CFUN's Afrocentricity, Black Arts production, and political activity to unarmed self-defense.[26] Maasi explained unarmed self-defense as an art form to CFUN participants and viewed his lessons as a foundational part of a Kawaidist transformation of Black life. He cofounded the BCD in East Orange with Balozi Zayd

[25] Desch-Obi, *Fighting for Honor*, 12. Obi and other scholars argue that you can identify that Black men involved in the Haitian Revolution used particular martial arts using a diversity of sources. Further, Obi has several sources from Brazil that indicate how bondsmen who practiced capoeira successfully took lives with their art. As he notes on page 12: "[it] becomes clear when one considers that while it was economic in its objective, the slave system was ultimately held together by physical and symbolic…violence. Therefore, it should not be surprising that at times African combat traditions were used in the Americas as forms of self-defense against this violence."

[26] "Shaha" is a title. As told to the author in an interview with Maasi, it means "learned elder." Mfundishi means "grandmaster" and was supposedly given to Maasi by Karenga. See Mfundishi Obuabasa Serikali, *Tai Chi Chuan: An Afriasian Resource for Health and Longevity* (New York: iUniverse, 2006), 5.

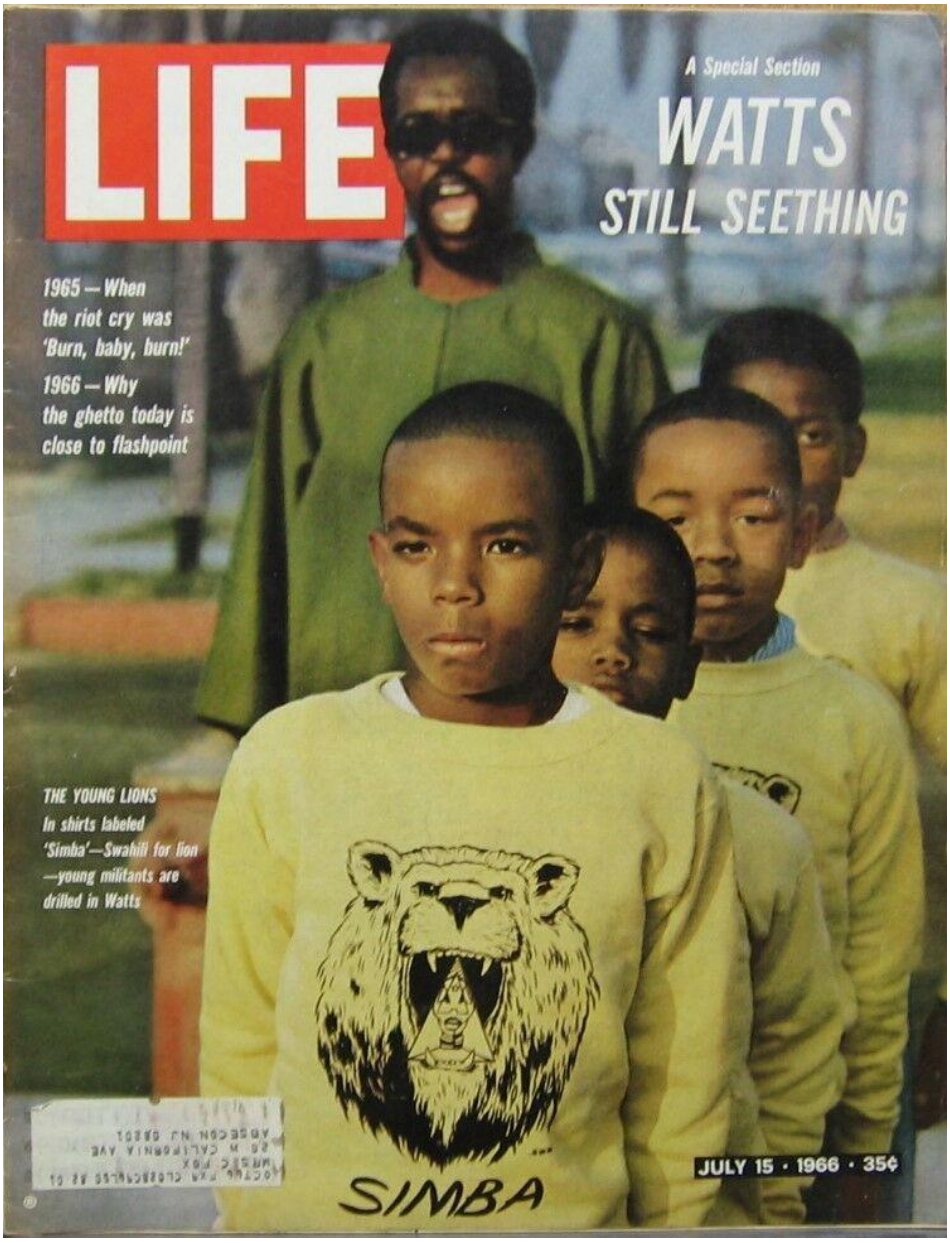

Figure 2-1 Cover Photo, *Life* Magazine 61, No. 3, July 15, 1966. Similar to how Gordon Parks photos of the FOI were featured in *Life* magazine 3 years earlier, this issue featured a story on the US. Its cover sported pictures of Carr-Damu yelling commands to the Simba Wadogo, the drill group for younger boys.

Muhammad "in the wake of the 1967 Black Power Conference."[27] They organized for safety and character development and fashioned the group after the US' Simba Wachanga."[28] The Simbas'

[27] Woodard, *Nation within a Nation*, 88.
[28] For information on "Simba Wachanga" and its meaning, see Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation* and Brown, *Fighting for US*.

desire to "stop pretending revolution and to make it," to build discipline and community, and to protect activists, influenced the BCD's structure and approach.[29]

Mfundishi Maasi's early life led him to his roles in the BCD and CFUN. Born William Nichols in 1941 in New Jersey, Maasi grew up in a family of Jamaican immigrants. As a child, he witnessed his grandfather from Above Rocks, Jamaica "wield a machete (known as cutlass in the islands)" and chop bushes with focus and precision, which Maasi believed to be his first exposure to the arts.[30] In 1959, Maasi began his service in the Marine Corps as part of a military police detachment stationed at Quonset Point Naval Air Station in Rhode in 1959. His martial arts training began there when a staff sergeant taught a class on Okinawan karate and Japanese jujutsu and judo, all of which the sergeant learned while deployed in East Asia. A year later, Maasi transferred to Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii and studied kempo karate under a sergeant named Robert Hope, an American Samoan who held a black belt.[31]

After being discharged in 1962, Maasi continued his studies under James Cheatham, the sensei of the only Black operated dojo in Newark. Cheatham taught boxing, judo, and shito ryu karate.[32] He learned karate from Wallace Reumann, an army veteran who studied the art while stationed in Japan during the 1950s.[33] As Maasi recalls it, "we were the only black school in

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[29] It is important to note that despite the brotherhood and intentions to help build young men, the Simba served a specific purpose. For outsiders who were not convinced of a forthcoming revolution, the group's training would have seemed severe. Choosing to join was painted as a serious life choice. The Simba Wachanga pledge in the *Quotable Karenga* noted that Simba "must believe in our cause and be willing to die for it." For more extensive talk on this, see Brown, *Fighting for US*, 55.

[30] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014. In regard to his grandfather and his impact, Maasi also wrote, "His posture was rooted and strong as he manipulated the cutlass with his powerful hand and forearms, developed through many years as a stone mason. A craft that he learned as a young man in the mountains of Above Rocks Jamaica. Observing him as a young boy, I witnessed the culmination of conditioning and skill. This lesson lives with me to this day."

[31] William Hinton and D'Arcy Rahming, *Men of Steel Discipline: The Official Oral History of Black Pioneers in the Martial Arts* (Chicago: Modern Bu-jutsu, Inc., 1994), 85.

[32] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline*, 47-48 and 86.

[33] Reumann was a student of Henry Slomanski. Slomanski was a Sergeant-Major in the U.S. Army and a combat veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars. He also started his training while stationed in Japan. He became a Japanese karate champion and an appointed commissioner for karate in West in the 1950s. See Sara Fogan, "Department of (Self-)-Defense: A retired Colonel Explains How the Martial Arts Have Influenced the U.S. Military," *Black Belt,* December 2003, https://books.google.com/books?id=V9sDAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover&rview=1#v=onepage&q&f=false; Charles Russo, *Striking Distance: Bruce Lee & the Dawn of Martial Arts in America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 116; and

Newark, New Jersey and either [Black youth] went to Dukers A.C., which was boxing or came to James Cheatham's school."[34] Cheatham demanded much from his student's physical training. Maasi transitioned easily into the dojo because the challenges fit well with the "state of mind" he had developed in the service.[35] "Chea didn't go into theory," he recanted in his oral history in William Hinton and D'Arcy Rahming's 1994 *Men of Steel Discipline*.[36] Maasi reminisced, "There was good physical grounding in Chea Chea's school. We were walking down the floor drilling, stop, mop up the sweat, and continue. I remember one night Prentiss Newton hit me and my teeth came through my bottom lip. I just covered it and we just kept dealing. I went and got stitched up afterwards. That's the kind of place it was."[37] Under these conditions, Maasi earned his second-degree black belt on May 18th, 1966.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Cheatham was a member of the Nation of Islam, which strove to develop religious masculinities oriented toward protecting the community and Muslim families.[38] Cheatham was "very political about power for black people" and "all of his black top guns, the black belts were affiliated with the Nation of Islam."[39] By the time Maasi began teaching at Mosque #25, the Nation had been teaching martial arts for roughly ten years. That Maasi taught in the Nation is evidence that the Nation was the earliest organization to model community-oriented instruction and form unarmed self-defense units. Maasi later took his experience teaching masculine character development and self-defense in the Fruit of Islam and

Thomas Green, "Afrikan Martial Arts," in Martial Arts of the World [2 volumes]: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation, ed. Thomas Green and Joseph Svinth, vol. 2 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 627.

[34] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 86. Martial arts and boxing in Newark were outlets for young Black men. According to Maasi, the school originally had a contingent of White American black belts, but they left when the school gathered a Black majority.

[35] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.

[36] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 86.

[37] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 86.

[38] See Chapter on the Nation of Islam for more.

[39] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 51.

transformed it into a Kawaidist martial arts practice that infused the US's training module with Black Arts.

When James Cheatham died in a plane crash in 1966, his school disbanded and Maasi founded his own school, the Hakeem Martial Arts Association where also taught young women. That school remained open until the "insurrection" or Newark Riot of 1967.[40] Newark had one of the most disruptive riots during the Long Hot Summer of 1967, "pretty much shut[ting] everything down."[41] During the fallout of the turbulence, Maasi became the bodyguard for Amiri Baraka.[42] Working with Baraka transformed Maasi. Baraka and others within Newark's socio-political climate "facilitated a rising or broadening of consciousness."[43] While traveling for Baraka's national lecture tours in 1968-1969, Maasi discussed with Baraka how to use art as a tool to liberate Black people. In that time period, he met Nganga Mfundishi Tolo-Naa, a Chicago-based instructor. Separately, they had pondered the African origins of martial arts. [44] Together, Maasi and Tolo-Naa investigated "principles" of West and Central African-descended arts and incorporated them into their classes.[45] They developed a style of martial arts called "Kupigana Ngumi," a Kiswahili-derived term meaning "the way of fighting with the fist." [46] Their work was part of a larger collision between Pan Africanist, cultural politics and martial arts that occurred because of the political-cultural work unfolding during the Black Power

[40] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013. In *Men of Steel Discipline*, written about 20 years prior to our interview, he calls it the African Martial Arts Society and says he founded it in 1966/1967.
[41] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[42] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 85.
[43] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[44] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013. "Nganga" can mean "healer," "doctor," or "priest." For more on Tolo-Naa and his usage of karate and tai chi, see Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 97-112.
[45] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 94.
[46] See Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 94-97 and Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.

Movement.[47] The forces that inspired their conclusions affected martial arts instructors throughout the country, sweeping many of them up in community organizing.

In Newark, Maasi held Kupigana Ngumi classes for adults as well as for the Simba Wachanga, who he taught every Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday. Instead of limiting unarmed self-defense training to CFUN's security forces, Maasi positioned martial arts classes within CFUN's broader framework. Like the Fruit of Islam, teaching martial arts for security did not preclude teaching it for personal development. Maasi contemplated how "to conceive of Black Martial Culture as a device for mental and spiritual liberation… rooted in African philosophy and principles."[48] Within CFUN's Kawaidist and Black Arts approach to organizing, there was a strategic motive behind teaching Kupigana Ngumi. As an art form, Kupigana Ngumi was not simply "Black Karate," as it has been derided. It was, Maasi argues, an

> outgrowth of the Black Empower movement that evolved from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s through the mid to late 1960s. Simply stated Kupigana Ngumi was a response to the psychological condition of black people in America, the Caribbean, South America and the African Continent. Though confined in the early days to black communities throughout the United States, the effort to empower disenfranchised Americans of African descent eventually modified the scope of liberation and democracy throughout the diaspora.[49]

Though it was based in Chinese and Japanese martial arts techniques, Kupigana Ngumi integrated cultural reflections that Maasi and Tolo-Naa believed students would identify with, later incorporating Angolan-descended movements as well. They hoped this would be more

[47] Before brainstorming with Tolo-Naa, Maasi decided to call the art he was teaching "Ya [way of Ngumi [fist]." He switched to Kupigana ngumi after telling Tolo-Naa, "Brother, Kupigana Ngumi has more of a thrust than Ya Ngumi…I'll go along with that." See Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 94. According to Scot Brown, the Simba under US learned martial arts under the same term spelled *yangumi*. See Brown, *Fighting for US*, photography page 10.
[48] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[49] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014.

effective and engaging than just teaching karate or judo. Kupigana Ngumi sought "to present art in a way that [Black] people at the time, who were in the midst of cultural struggle, could relate to on a cultural level." It utilized African-inspired terms such as the Shona principles "kuzviata" and "kurimedza, loosely translating to "reach out and touch yourself" and "to enthrone with dignity," respectively. [50] The instructors used them to cultivate an educational atmosphere where students learned discipline and saw a Black cultural significance to strengthening their fortitudes and characters. "I found that these methods helped to bind the brothers in principle in a way that they would relate to each other not as...competitors," Maasi noted, "but as brothers on the field of cultural battle."[51] For him, equipping young warriors with the tools to succeed on the front of cultural battle meant building up confidence and positive cultural associations.

To respond to the conditions that both activists and neighborhood youth faced, Kupigana Ngumi, as an organizing tactic, strove to teach "knowledge of self."[52] As a component of Black Power organizing, self-enlightenment and improvement training were a significant to a well-rounded political-cultural movement. Starting with the self, as an approach to social progress, is seen in other forms of Black Power organizing such as Black political education classes, which focused on self-improvement through reading. Martial arts classes provided a different entry into Black philosophical change. For organizations such as CAP and the Nation, individual transformation was a bulwark of Black nationhood and a central pedagogical aim. Before one could productively contribute to a new Black sense of nation externally, students of Black nationalism in Newark's martial arts classes started with the self. From the perspective of BAM theorists like Nathan Hare, who wrote the BAM essay "Brainwashing of Black Men's Minds,"

[50] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[51] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[52] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline,* 87.

younger generations could only break free from a cycle of mental colonization after gaining historical knowledge and political enlightenment.[53] Bodily training was meant to be the physical manifestation of an internal struggle to decolonize their existence within the United States. Together, a twin internal/external struggle could lead to freeing the spirit, mind, and body to reinterpret a student's self-worth.[54]So while not all Maasi's students became part of CFUN's security, they all had to grapple with finding individual enlightenment and make the transition from the "slave mentality" of "negroes" to Black men.[55] The intended outcome was to make community-oriented activists whose self-worth moved them to increase community empowerment and growth.

Though the curriculum was thought out, the gender dynamics remained static in CFUN's late 1960s martial arts classes. Though Maasi's original school had two female students, as with the Fruit of Islam, the Simba Wachanga were all young men.[56] Scholars note that in the mid-1960s, groups characterized as cultural nationalists often organized in sex-segregated spaces and differentiated women's and men's purposes, again mirroring the Nation's structure.

[53] Maasi also explained his philosophy in terms of a wheel metaphor. If life is a wheel, you perpetually roll around on that wheel because you do not understand how to jump off it. When you finally comprehend how the wheel works, you can jump off and free yourself of the monotonous cycles or "continuous incarnations" of that life. Maasi views this wheel as the mental colonization of African Americans living in 1960s and 1970s urban America. Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline*, 91-92.
[54] Theoretically, before young folks help build and defend a sense of community, they had to defend and interrogate their own identities in ways envisioned by activist leaders. Creating political change was happening alongside what CAP organizers saw as the plight of Black youth who were growing up in a society that shaped much of their self-images and controlled their avenues of destiny. The 1965 Moynihan report cited the bodies of Black women as problematic territories. From a certain Black Arts perspective, High schools and colleges filled the minds of Black students with Eurocentric social and cultural history from a White American perspective. Thus, youth could not change the landscapes of their communities without help. Black theorists thought that by identifying and subverting the image issues, they could overcome them using tools such as martial arts classes. Instructors did their part then by supplying a means of overpowering these issues.
[55] See Nathan Hare, "Brainwashing of Black Men's Minds," in *Black Fire: An Anthology of Afro-American Writing*, ed. by Amiri Baraka and Larry Neal (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2007).
[56] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013. The school had no more than twenty-five students total before its demise.

Table 2-1: The Nine Lives of the Ancient Masters: In his classes, Maasi emphasized that overcoming personal fears, desires, and limitations, not an opponent, led to self-discovery, rooted in the karate principle that the greatest enemy one faces is the inner self.[57] In order to complete the art of self-discovery and "self-mastery," Maasi taught "The Nine Lives of the Ancient Masters." While Kupigana Ngumi relied on African influences, this East Asian-derived martial arts philosophy served as Maasi's mission statement. The tenants reflect how a warrior interacts with each sector of life. As a "vehicle for enlightenment," these principles echoed self-advancement ideals of many Black Power Movement and Black Arts Movement organizers.[58]

1.	The life that the warrior lives with his inner self is one of internal harmony and balance.
2.	The life he lives with his family is one of devotion and unity.
3.	The life he lives with his friends and associates is one of loyalty and honesty.
4.	The life he lives with his superiors and elders is one of respect and honor.
5.	The life he lives with his weapons, which are the instruments of combat, is one of patience and dedication to improve his or her skills.
6.	The life he lives when facing his opponents is one of confidence and courage.
7.	The life he lives when in communion with nature is one of humility and admiration.
8.	The life he lives when in communion with the spirit of the dead and the spirit of warriors who have gone on is one of homage and reverence.

[57] See Richard Kim, *The Weaponless Warriors* (Santa Clarita: Ohara Publications, Inc., 1974). James Johnson, one of the two instructors responsible for teaching for CAP Camden, also stated that martial arts created a meeting place to learn about one's inner self and finding serenity.
[58] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline*, 87.

9.	The life he plans to live after his death is one of serenity and tranquility for he has lived the disciplined life of a warrior.[59]

Ashley Farmer discusses how Black women forced patriarchal ideas about roles to change in the early 1970s, but Maasi's classes predated these ideological and programmatic shifts.[60] He focused solely on leading men past the contagious "self-limiting thoughts, the sense of inferiority, and hopelessness, and the loss of heritage, dignity, and self-respect."[61]

Though constrained by narrow notions of gender participation, CFUN's martial arts training blossomed beyond reproducing security practices of the state and the "ability to beat somebody."[62] However, the practicality of the art was still relevant. The battlefields that CFUN faced were not merely cultural. Outside of class, CFUN also used the self-defense aspect of these hybrid arts to defend Black bodies organizing for political power, as when Maasi protected Amiri Baraka from Anthony Imperiale. Imperiale was a Marine Corps veteran of the Korean War who became a martial arts master. He commanded an Italian American vigilante self-defense group after the 1967 riots. He headquartered the group at his own martial arts school.[63] A future New Jersey State Senator, he tried to prevent Black political organizing in Newark on numerous occasions and drove around policing and attacking Black and Brown people at neighborhood borders and voting polls. In one instance, Maasi moved in between Baraka and Imperiale during an encounter and grabbed Imperiale's testicles to prevent him from

[59] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013. The author has standardized the pronouns used across each tenant.
[60] For more, see Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 122.
[61] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013
[62] Hinton, *Men of Steel Discipline*, 91.
[63] See Ronald Sullivan, "Newark's White Vigilante Group, Opposed by Governor, Sees Itself as an Antidote to Riots," *New York Times*, June 24, 1968, 23.

advancing.[64] For CFUN, it was not enough to be a "dojo master." For the men who learned martial arts, fighting skills needed to be successful beyond the wooden floors and glass mirrors of practice spaces. They trained to use their art on the streets of political theatre. Training was not useful if it could not be tested in the face of serious injury on the political "battlefield." As Baraka motivated grassroots organizers through his call-to-action poetry, Maasi's self-defense lessons allowed them to fight off racist attackers.

CFUN was not successful in electing candidates to Newark's city council in 1968. However, in May 1970, CFUN, as part of a coalition with Puerto Rican activists and other Black political actors, successfully elected Kenneth C. Gibson, the first Black mayor of a large Northeast city.[65] Four months later, the Atlanta convening occurred that created the Congress of African People. While Maasi and the BCD seemed to have attended the meeting and sided with Baraka over Maulana Karenga during heated encounters, it is unclear as to how long they remained affiliated with the Newark branch. The original CFUN coalition eventually dissolved over its own tensions.[66] Maasi returned to teaching in East Orange while its first Black mayor, William Hart, was in office. Starting in 1972, Maasi ran a gender-inclusive martial arts course under the Model Cities program, sponsored by President Johnson's Great Society and War on Poverty initiative.[67] Even after Maasi's departure, martial arts continued to be a part of CAP Newark's organizing strategy to achieve political self-determination. Martial artists like Tarek

[64] Komozi Woodard, in person conversation with author, 2014.
[65] Woodard, *Nation within a Nation*, 162 and 140-155. I qualify "major" here to point out that William Stanford Hart Sr. was elected in 1969 as the mayor of East Orange, New Jersey, where the BCD originated from. But East Orange was and is smaller than Newark.
[66] Woodard, *Nation within a Nation*, 166 and 112-113. The BCD took a stand with Baraka at the meeting when he formally split with Karenga. As for the dissolution of CFUN itself, though there is no clear narrative as to why, Woodard cites ideological issues.
[67] "From Congress of Afrikan People to Revolutionary Communist League (M-L-M)," *Unity and Struggle*, June 1976 and Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013. Maasi commented about having and educating female students.

Aziz served as new bodyguards for Baraka. In one instance, Aziz spun on the ball of his left foot in a full counterclockwise rotation to shield Baraka.[68]

By crafting Kupigana Ngumi as a "tool to awaken consciousness," Maasi and Naa participated in a broad-based movement seeking to derive a Black Art and Black Aesthetic as part of cultural transformation, placing them in conversation with poets, playwrights, and musicians like Nikki Giovanni, Ed Bullins, and Sun-Ra. As Larry Neal wrote in his piece "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," "A cultureless revolution is a bullcrap tip. It means that in the process of making the revolution, we lose our vision…In short, a revolution without a culture would destroy the very thing that now unites us; the very thing we are trying to save along with our lives."[69] Incorporating principles like kurimedza ("to enthrone with dignity") into martial arts classes aligned with efforts by certain BAM artists to "practice…elements of African culture found throughout the African Diaspora."[70] The incorporation aligned with BAM and Black Power desires to produce "kujichagulia" (self-determination).[71] Embarking upon a "path to learn [and] gain appreciation" of heterogeneous African Diasporic cultures was a phenomenon that can be seen in the work of many neo-Pan Africanists who united behind a transnational, pan-Black racial mythos post-World War II. [72]

II. The Congress of African People, the Council of Independent Black Institutions, and Martial Arts as Curriculum

When CAP became a national organization in 1970, martial arts thrived inside and outside of electoral politics and contributions to the Black Arts Movement. Martial artistry's maturity in

[68] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[69] Collins and Crawford, "Introduction," 7.
[70] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014.
[71] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014.
[72] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014.

CAP came through associated independent schools such as Brooklyn's Uhuru Sasa Shule and the School of Afreecam Culture in Camden, New Jersey. Black independent schools and community centers that held k-8/k-12 schools, extracurricular programs for teenagers, and adult classes were a significant part of Black Power expressions of freedom. As a result, in 1972, several neo-Pan African schools formed the Council of Independent Black Institutions (CIBI). According to historians Russell Rickford and Kwasi Konadu, the CIBI strategically organized independent schools to combat the inadequacies of public education that had not been solved by desegregation.[73] CAP schools participated in a movement that funneled energy into founding alternatives that stimulated Black intellectual growth, invested in diverse coursework, or focused on both comprehension and completion. The independent schools were also sites of political organizing and sites to prepare future leaders. In *Achieving Blackness*, Algernon Austin recounts that "education was explicitly meant to create activists."[74] Kawaida's Seven Principles of Blackness framed the CIBI's approach to political and cultural education. The methodological use of history was foundational. Teachers taught students about "black political struggles in the United States, Africa, and in the rest of the African Diaspora."[75]

At the East Center in Brooklyn, an extensive and dynamic world of martial arts arose. The East was a "multiplex community institution [in Brooklyn, New York], dedicated to the principles of self-determination, nation building, and Black nationalist consciousness."[76] It was founded under the leadership of Jitu Weusi (Leslie R. Campbell), who served as its director and a director of the CIBI.[77] The East opened its school, Uhuru Sasa Shule or "Freedom Now School,"

[73] See Rickford, *We are an African People*, and Konadu, *A View from the East*. For more information, see Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*; Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*; and Austin, *Achieving Blackness*.
[74] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 103.
[75] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 103.
[76] Konadu, *A View from the East*, xiv.
[77] Jitu Weusi literally translates to "Giant Black."

in 1970.[78] The staff wanted students to "develop a new personality, an African personality," to become "conscious political beings," and to learn how to "take over all aspects of [leading] the community."[79] Instructors included James Forman, formerly of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), who taught organizing strategy. Lessons from the "Weusi (Black) alphabet" included: "O is for organize and then we will nationalize."[80] Within this larger organizing curriculum, the East inserted martial arts instruction. As Austin notes, "In addition to the self-defense and disciplinary benefits of martial arts, students were taught that they might someday use their martial arts skills in a revolutionary struggle."[81]

Though it was not the only CIBI school to teach martial arts, Uhuru Sasa Shule provided one of the most thorough curriculums.[82] As one of the longest enduring CIBI institutions, the Uhuru Sasa Shule taught martial arts from the early 1970s through the 1980s. The 1971 *Uhuru Sasa Shule Institutional Booklet* outlined the school's seven curricular subfields: language arts, social studies, math, science, creativity, work body development, and family affairs.[83] "Work body Development" folded self-defense into a larger project that aimed to develop a well-rounded student whose physical competence complimented the mental preparation in other subjects. The school paired self-defense paired with gymnastics, physical fitness, drilling, and weapons classes to create a holistic physical education that produced self-reliance, task management, and manual deftness.[84] And unlike early formations in Newark, youth classes taught boys and girls.

[78] Konadu, *A View from the East*, XIV and 31.
[79] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 103.
[80] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 103.
[81] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 104.
[82] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 103. Austin argues it was the most thorough.
[83] Konadu, *A View from the East*, 165.
[84] Konadu, *A View from the East*, 165.

Table 2-2: By 1980, the martial arts classes were a part of programing for the Kawaida principles Kujichagulia (self-determination) and Umoja (unity) while other aspects of vocational and physical education were considered Ujamaa (cooperative economics).

8:00-8:50 a.m.	Morning ceremonies, breakfast, and martial arts (Umoja)
8:50-9:00 a.m.	Pledge song
9:00-9:45 a.m.	Math (Nia)
9:45-10:30 a.m.	Language arts (Nia)
10:30-11:15 a.m.	History, social studies, geography, political education (Nia)
11:15 a.m-12:00 p.m.	Science (Nia)
12:00-1:00 p.m.	Lunch (Ujima)
1:00-1:45 p.m.	Humanities (Kuumba)
1:45-3:00 p.m.	Martial arts (Kujichagulia) [85]
3:00-3:45 p.m.	Vocational and Physical education (Ujamaa):
3:45-4:00 pm.	Closing Ceremonies, "which included the pledge, songs, notices, and announcements, and inspirational words"

The inclusion of martial arts across youth programming, for age groups from 3 to 18, indicated its role as an asset for "African" youth development; but it was additionally a central asset to adult programs. Uhuru Sasa Shule's adult education was immersed in holistic wellness, well-rounded self-defense, and body development. The East's periodical, *Black News*, published advertisements for night school and self-defense classes throughout the 1970s. In the fall of 1973, the school paired judo and "jui-jitsu" trainings with classes in communications, economics, Swahili, "self-discovery," and photography.[86] The 1979 "Evening School of

[85] This conflicts with the schedule that Konadu lists in his Appendix E on pages 166-168. This schedule must be from a different time period. In it, 3-7-year olds learned "self-defense and other activities to strengthen the body" in the same afternoon time slot as "arts and crafts and African storytelling." At the elementary school, children from 8-14 learned self-defense in the morning, alongside first aid and hygiene. Immediately after, they went to a closing ceremony where they pledged alliance to the Liberation Flag and sang "We Have Done Black Things Today." The same Appendix notes that the secondary program for 14-18-year olds incorporated martial arts into its "recreational" and sports programs.

[86] Uhuru Sasa Shule Evening School Advertisement, *Black News*, October 22, 1973, 27.

Knowledge" taught self-defense techniques classes for beginners and intermediates on Thursday nights. This complemented the rest of the week's schedule which featured yoga, nutrition, "patrol" classes, political education, and poetry and theatre workshops.[87] In-depth gun training was also present, including "safe and proper handling, cleaning, and storing of guns.[88] Instructors of the martial arts classes included judo master Walter Bowe, who, along with his wife Nannie Bowe, was part of On Guard For Freedom, a precursor to the collectives of the BAM Era.[89]

One hundred miles south of Brooklyn, CAP Camden exclusively taught martial to adults at their CIBI school, the School of Afreecam Culture, which opened in 1972. [90] In the years before CAP's Camden office opened, the activist energy in the Philadelphia-Camden metro area was vibrant. The Black Panther Party convened the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, the largest interracial, radical conference of its time, in Philadelphia in 1970. A year later, prisoners at the New York State prison Attica staged a revolt, which inspired organizers in Camden.[91] Inspired by the fervor of the moment, jazz lovers and industrial workers in the city channeled their passions into different forms of organizing, including creating a vigilante group

[87] The East Evening School Advertisement, *Black News*, February 1, 1979, 23. Also see Konadu, *A View from the East*, 169-170. Both in 1973 and 1979, martial arts classes were taught at 7p.m. on Thursdays. They were a part of holistic body development. It also included: "body movement and exercises to develop grace and mobility and better control of our physical bodies;" yoga "postures, breathing techniques, and elementary meditation techniques" for beginners and intermediates; nutrition; "acting techniques and skills geared to bring out the ability that is innate in all of us;" and "children's theater: develop[ing] the creative, imaginative spontaneity of children for use in meaningful daily life activities or on stage."

[88] Konadu, *A View from the East*, 169.

[89] A Judo expert who taught the "Jui-Jitsu" and "Judo" classes, Walter Bowe, was prosecuted in 1965 as part of an alleged bomb plot to blow up the statue of liberty. This occurred the week before Malcolm X's death. For more see, Garrett Felber, "Malcolm X assassination: 50 years on, mystery still clouds details of the case," *The Guardian*, February 21, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/feb/21/malcolm-x-assassination-records-nypd-investigation. Alongside his wife Nanny Bowe, Walter Bowe was also part of the collective, On Guard For Freedom, a precursor to the collectives of the Black Arts Movement. For more On Guard With Freedom and its role in bringing together early BAM figures and 1960s politics, see Tom Dent, "Umbra Days," *Black American Literature Forum* 14, no. 3 (Autumn 1980): 105-08, doi:10.2307/3041660 and Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 118-119 and 146.

[90] James Johnson, email message to author, December 5, 2018.

[91] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. These moments were particularly impactful on Johnson, who also read books such as Franz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. He said finished in a month because of how it provided dynamic "mental preparation for waging revolution."

that walked the streets to curb the solicitation of sex work aimed at Black women.[92] The same fervor to create community change eventually created the School of Afreecam Culture. The CAP Camden activists who opened it had studied at Philadelphia's Freedom Library. Run by former SNCC member John Churchville,[93] Freedom Library was a meeting powerhouse for Black Power activists and educators from the greater Philadelphia area, including James (Weusi) Johnson, one of Camden's primary martial arts instructors.[94]

Johnson was raised in the Strawberry Mansions section of North Philadelphia in 1947, to two southern-born parents.[95] His introduction to combat sports started early as a participant in Black Philadelphia's boxing world.[96] Respected for the sport, North Philadelphia developed a tradition of boxing greatness through champions like Sonny Liston and Kitten Haywood, mirroring the trend of boxing popularity among post-WWI communities."[97] The son of a World War II veteran who worked as a navy yard truck driver and as a barber, Johnson's childhood exposure to activism and imperialism moved him toward a Black nationalist politic.[98] During elementary and middle school, Johnson carried a picket sign to fight desegregation alongside

[92] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. Once, when a man accosted a woman, they carjacked him in order to force him to end his harassment. It is debatable as to whether these actions came from a radical critique of harassment. It is possible their action steps against sex work were related to something else, such as Black masculine ideas about protecting womanhood. Recent scholars have critiqued the shaming that Black women receive as sex workers and the agency stripped from sex workers. It is important to keep this in mind, even if we consider the good that comes from stopping people from seeing all Black women, including non-sex workers, as always open and accessible for sex acts.

[93] See Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), and Rickford, *We are an African People*. Bob Moses, also of SNCC, was an instructor there, too.

[94] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. These activists from the Philadelphia area included Ahmed and Kenya Latif who ran a school and community space as well. According to Johnson, he and others went on to teach at the Afrikan Free School of South Philadelphia, run by the Oshogbo family, in order to gain experience as teachers.

[95] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. He lived near 30th and Lehigh streets.

[96] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017.

[97] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. While he never participated in amateur boxing matches, he traded blows to the head and concussions in informal matches, jointly showing off the "skills we were proud of." Johnson appreciated the "ritualisticness" of boxing and its function as a "competitive kind…of combat." In an era before the proliferation of firearms, Johnson believed that pugilism resolved conflicts and caused swelling eyes while avoiding the fatality of gun fights, resonating among young black men as a way to navigate and deal with interpersonal disagreements and issues.

[98] James Johnson in discussion with the author. He shined shoes at the barbershop for World War II veterans three days a week for two years in middle school. From the complex view of former Black soldiers, they discussed their lives and "their views of the 1960s as they unfolded." Reading Jet magazine also influenced Johnson's view of the world. His first organizing experience happened against Al Focal, who wanted to convert the beer license of a restaurant into a tap room at 30th street and Lehigh in a Black neighborhood.

Cecil B. Moore, president of Philadelphia's NAACP. He also protested apartheid in South Africa and was impacted by the decolonial movements across Africa.[99] During the 1964 Philadelphia Uprising, Johnson attend Thomas A. Edison High School, which lost the most alumni of any high school during the Vietnam War.[100] After graduating in 1966, Johnson served as a seaman for the merchant marines and travelled to Egypt and Vietnam, where he delivered supplies to the American troops.[101] Servicing the U.S. military and its sponsored industries developed Johnson's anti-imperialist consciousness, creating a parallel narrative to that of Maasi. Upon his return, Johnson committed to fighting racism and imperialism and resisting oppression.[102]

At home, Johnson saw martial arts practiced by members of the Nation of Islam in Camden and began to see them as a vehicle for "organizing to make a better world."[103] After doing his own training under James Bey, a member of the Moorish Science Temple, he helped start CAP Camden.[104] At the School of Afreecam Culture, he instructed with Tunza Eusi (Tyrone Edwards), who learned kempo self-defense while in the Marines. Their instruction team

[99] See Countryman, *Up South*, 136-144. Though unclear, it is likely he met him after the protests over Philadelphia's failure to prevent discrimination in city construction contracts. An NAACP picket led by Moore began in May of 1962 in the Strawberry Mansion section where Johnson grew up. But incongruences exist in the memories. Johnson said he was in 6th grade when met Moore and 1962 and would have been his freshman year in high school.

[100] Johnson says 66 alumni died, but sources vary on the exact number. The original building, located at either 7th and Lehigh or 8th and Leigh, was torn down (Johnson remembers the cross street as 7th. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* cites it as 8th). It is now named Thomas Alva Edison High School and John C. Fareira Skills Center. It is located at Front and Luzerne streets. See Tommy Rowan, "Documentary coming on 27 Father Judge High grads killed in Vietnam," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 2018, https://www.inquirer.com/philly/news/pennsylvania/philadelphia/father-judge-high-school-philly-grads-killed-vietnam-documentary-20180626.html. According to his testimony, Johnson would have graduated one year before the 1967 Philadelphia Student demonstrations.

[101] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. There he witnessed a poverty that "predate[d] [the] homelessness [he would witness arise] in U.S.," interacting with his first "cardboard cities there." He said, "I'd be on the side of Vietnam [too]," recalling people standing in line to obtain a single bowl of "gruel" scrapped together from GI leftovers.

[102] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. As uprisings happened back in Philadelphia, Johnson toiled on a Texaco oil tanker travelling from Minnesota to Trinidad. He was docked in Pilottown, Louisiana, a river city community, when Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated on April 4th, 1968. Just two months later on June 5th, he was on his way Thailand via the Panama Canal when he found out his father died, prompting a return home routed through Honolulu. Remaining thereafter, Johnson began working across the river from Philadelphia in Glassboro, New Jersey, in a bottle cap factory in 1970 and later as a meat cutter in Camden, New Jersey.

[103] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 11, 2017.

[104] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. One of a handful of Black vendors, Bey sold goods at 11th and Market Street in Center City. One to two dozen adults trained under him so they could teach martial arts in independent schools. He taught at the New Freedom Theatre in Philadelphia. This is information is from Johnson's recollections.

received mentorship from the CAP Newark martial artists who succeeded Maasi. The two branches held training exchanges between 1973 and 1975. Newark's artists modeled a complete approach to unarmed self-defense, focusing on conditioning, diet, as well as readiness "to fight forreal."[105] They blocked, punched, and sparred, practicing kicks repeatedly in their sessions.[106] They sought real world applications of techniques, chasing the warriorhood Baraka described. When they trained they wore sweatpants, not Japanese *gi*s.[107] Martial arts belts were de-emphasized. They considered martial arts ranks to be ineffective against the conditions and anxieties that CAP members faced.

Though there is no evidence that anyone from CAP Camden used their skills for self-defense, members truly believed that they were being "actively pursued by the state…[and] felt [the training] was necessary."[108] State repression and racial tensions instilled fear that all forms of self-defense might be necessary, especially after shots were fired into CAP's headquarters in Newark.[109] Given the difficulty of transferring training into a real scenario, it was important to take seriously the notion of protecting people, regardless of whether it came to fruition.[110] Given this, the importance of martial arts was not only the tactical nature of the training but its internal nature: the "focus, contemplation, reflection, and introspection."[111] Similar to Maasi, Johnson

[105] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 17, 2017. These artists included such as Majadi [full name currently known], the primary self-defense instructor after Maasi, Nzogi [full name currently unknown], Tyrek Aziz, and Ngoma [full name currently unknown].
[106] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 17, 2017.
[107] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 17, 2017.
[108] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 17, 2017.
[109] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 17, 2017.
[110] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017. Johnson never had to defend himself using his skills, nor was he ever responsible for guarding another's body. To his knowledge, no one from his classes would up using their self-defense skills either.
[111] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 2017.

and Eusi believed in martial arts study as a framework for self-assessment, increasing the "wholeness…[and] the extension of self" and instilling confidence.[112]

The East, CAP Camden, and their schools departed the Congress of African People organization in the mid-1970s. In a 1973 letter to Amiri Baraka, Jitu Weusi argued that CAP Brooklyn did not have to follow CAP Newark's ideological struggles, and the East's association dissolved in 1974.[113] The split did not affect The East's commitment to martial arts training and, as highlighted above, martial arts remained a part of its post-CAP agenda between 1974-1984. CAP Camden seemed to weather initial controversies and national debates that pertained to being a part of CAP. Martial classes remained at the School of Afreecam Culture until roughly 1975. Rifts over polygamy and Marxism finally sprinkled into Camden and the school closed,[114] leaving practitioners like Johnson to train on their own.[115] CAP itself dissolved soon after and

[112] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 17, 2017. According to Johnson, the women of CAP Camden supposedly grappled with these lessons in sex-segregated classes and were not completely precluded from the space of warriorhood. If this is true, then it was likely a result of CAP's shifting gender perspectives. While the idea of warriorhood was apparently inclusive of women in Camden, Johnson could not identify more details about their training or their instructor.

[113] Konadu, *A View from the East*, 147-149.

[114] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 11 and 17, 2017. Broadly speaking, the African Free School of Newark and its staff served as mentors for the staff in Camden. Many of the former were college educated or had had more time thinking through political, economic, and school development using the organization's Black nationalism. However, issues began to arise internally across the organization. Johnson notes that the CAP chapters of New Jersey, especially Camden, seemed to avoid the explosive fights between CAP and the Black Panther Party that hurt both organizations in Los Angeles. Still, they could not avoid debates over the role of polygamy in Black nationalism, debates that can be traced to those within Karenga's L.A. Branch. In fact, a year after joining CAP, polygamy became a large issue and fights over monogamy versus polygamy eventually caused CAP Camden to lose half its membership. Long before the polygamy debates, the Camden organizers had debated internally whether or not they should join CAP at all. Finally, when CAP Newark moved to the political Left under Baraka's leadership, it caused an unsolvable divide. Though pursuing labor organizing in the Marxist-Leninist tradition fed Johnson's spirit, Marxism proved to be the "final nail in the office" for folks who could not "adopt a [supposedly] European derivation" of liberation and the CAP Camden office slowly dissipated.

[115] James Johnson in discussion with the author, December 11 and 17, 2017. Afterward, Johnson continued to organize and "practice [his martial arts] independently." In 1976, he worked on a Prisoner Support Committee and he would focus on labor organizing between 1977 and 1980. He enjoyed working with laborers and talking about "who they were as a class," the potential they had, and sharing knowledge from the Black nationalist magazine *Unity and Struggle*, based out of CAP Newark. While working as a school security guard, he organized students and teachers around an African Liberation Support Committee in order to raise consciousness. Johnson also apparently participated in a Camden County tenants' united fronted around improving housing and fought against police brutality and "killer" cops. Watching Amiri Baraka type a 27-page document overnight influenced James to continue developing his intellectual acumen. (He was also inspired by Yosef Alfredo Antonio Ben-Jochannan, whose controversial scholarship has been questioned. Johnson went back to school to receive his B.S. in Political Science from Glassboro State (now Rowan University) in 1983 and received his Ph.D. in History in 2000. Johnson currently writes on a variety of topics like how the history of policing in Camden began to curb the activity of "white hooligans." However, Johnson did not resume his formal martial arts training until later in his life in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He worked to earn his 3rd degree Black Belt in Okinawan Kempo under Hanshi Ron Dargan in West Deptford, New Jersey. At

many of its ardent supporters like Baraka moved toward the Black left and "repudiated black nationalism."[116]

Though their time within CAP was short, these groups organized with a movement for martial arts instruction that was larger than CAP itself.[117] Within a Kawaida-influenced approach to Black Nationalist curricula, it was impossible to exclusively teach firearms. Martial arts made unarmed self-defense a component of Black organizing for individual and community defense. Though it varied, class inclusivity reveals that organizers could not separate martial arts study from other subjects meant to produce Black autonomy at individual and community levels.

III. The Congress of African People, Martial Arts, and Black Educational Print Culture

In addition to CAP's usage of martial arts in schools, its inclusion of martial arts in published materials is also striking. Print culture broadly encompassed a vibrant bedrock of Black Power and Black Arts community engagement. Organizations clamored to create and maintain autonomous print media and presses in cities like Chicago, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. Broadside Press, *Negro Digest/Black World,* and *Soulbook,* among others, fulfilled activists commitment to creating economically and politically autonomous Black art. [118] CAP Newark and The East participated in national print culture through publishing houses like Jihad Publications and periodicals such as *Unity and Struggle* and *Black News*, which were involved in their political and cultural organizing strategy.[119] With the establishment of *Black News* in 1969,

Dargan's dojo, he set the record for wooden board breaking. However, he would eventually stop studying at the school after certain instructors expressed sentiments against the Movement for Black Lives, which he considers himself to be a part of. He says he could not continue to train there because his politics made him "take a spiritual knee" in solidarity with the Colin Kaepernick's protest against anti-black racism and the national anthem in the National Football League.

[116] Woodard, *Nation within a Nation*, 254.

[117] Chapter 3 discusses martial arts within the Panthers Oakland Community School, making further arguments about the importance of martial arts practice to Black independent schools within the Black Power Era.

[118] Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement*, 12-13.

[119] *Unity and Struggle* likely gets its name from the book of the same name by the Bissau-Guinean theorist, Amílcar Cabral.

which was founded to "'Agitate, Educate, [and] Organize,'" The East initiated a system of interconnected publications to "establish a communication link within the African-based community."[120] The East's print culture both filled a community need and hailed a community into being, helping to create and sustain an "African audience" in Brooklyn and beyond.[121]

Besides the widely circulated *Black News*, The East produced pamphlets, guides, and handbooks that demonstrated their approach to education and martial arts. The 1971 *Institutional Handbook* and 1980 *Parent Handbooks* codified their views on martial and community building, but they also detailed this relationship in other learning materials. One prominent example is the Swahili titled *Jana-Leo-Na-Kesho! or Yesterday…Today and Tomorrow (YTT).* A 1972 publication released before The East's split with the Congress of African People, *YYT* was prepared by Seitu Jim Dyson, a member of Brooklyn's Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). Dyson was a prolific artist and drew many covers for *Black News*. Inside *YTT,* he coupled cartoons, historical essays, and poems with cultural comprehension questions, exposing youth to James Weldon Johnson's "Ragtime Roots of Jazz" and Sonia Sanchez's voice. Displayed amongst essays is a coloring series called "Martial Arts/Mental & Physical Development."[122] Appropriately, the section follows excerpts of the novel *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* by Sam Greenlee, who I discuss at length in Chapter 4. The book's protagonist, Black CIA operative Dan Freeman, is secretly a Black revolutionary who uses his skills from the state to train guerrilla freedom fighters. Freeman is both a Judo expert and Korean War veteran.[123] From a CAP Black nationalist perspective, Dyson's placement of Greenlee's excerpt before the martial arts section was thematic, specifically because the excerpt depicts a Black Nationalist using martial arts to kill a corrupt

[120] Konadu, *A View from the East*, 68.
[121] *Black News* garnered a circulation of around 50,000 and was delivered to 32 states and 5 foreign countries. See Konadu, *A View from the East*, 72 and 186-187.
[122] See Jim Dyson, Y*esterday…Today and Tomorrow: A Black Reading Experience* (Brooklyn: Uhuru Sasa Shule, Inc., 1972).
[123] For more on Greenlee, see Chapter 4 on popular culture.

Black police officer. Dyson's choice demonstrated the East's take on the crookedness of policing within the United States and provided reasons why young activists might need to defend themselves against another Black person, one The East believed had internalized anti-Blackness and acted uncritically on behalf of the state.[124] For Dyson, the martial arts series was not a break from Black Nationalist learning but a necessary educational intervention.

On the series' first page (Figure 2-2 below), children absorbed four, dynamic images while coloring them in "using crayons, colored pencils or watercolors."[125] In the top-left panel (Image B), aikido students calmly use "hand/wrist techniques for throwing." It demonstrates a technique that twists the palm until the wrist faces the outside of the body and forces the opponent to flip or break their bone.[126] The top-right panel (Image C) depicts a karateka,[127] or karate student,

[124] The East's take on policing was not shared by all Black instructors who believed in Black Power. Here I am referring to the Black martial artists that believed in sharing their martial arts skills with police officers. This included men like Moses Powell, who once again, despite the Nation's weariness of and bad interactions with police, taught law enforcements officers during his life. See Chapters…for more.

[125] Dyson, *Yesterday*, 14.

[126] Dyson, *Yesterday*, 14. This demonstrated principle uses the flow and energy of the attacker against them, commonly used in aikido and Japanese jujutsu. Dyson's illustration of this technique bears resemblance to a technique called *te gami* or "hand mirror," used in some styles of Japanese jujutsu. Both characters in this panel are in *hakama*, which would indicate they are belts and are demonstrating respect for the manners of modernized Japanese martial arts. They were originally used as pants by Japanese horsemen, and in aikido, the folds signify seven principles.

[127] The suffix "ka" that follows the name of a Japanese martial arts style and means student.

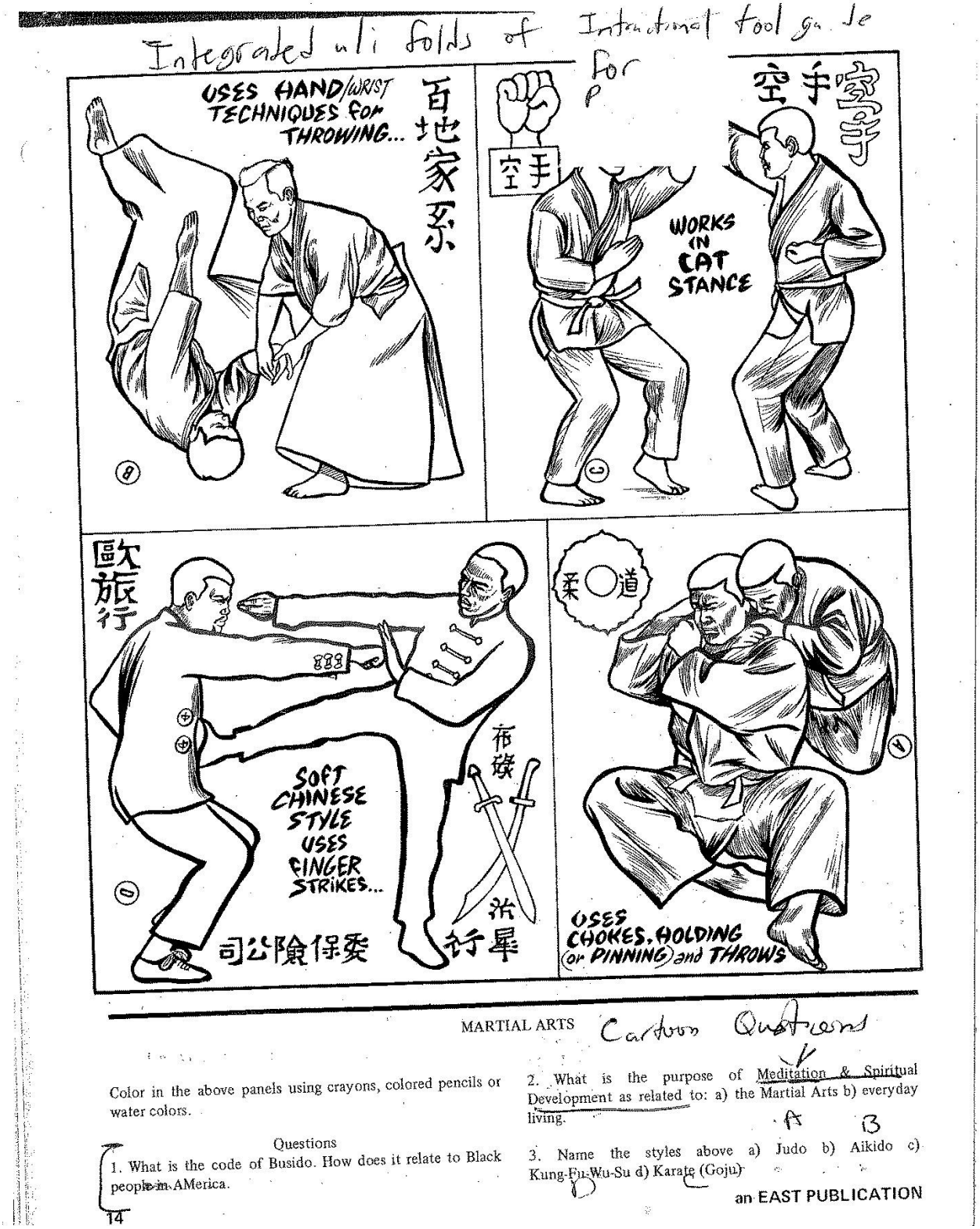


Figure 2-2 Cartoon, *Yesterday…Today and Tomorrow*, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

practicing a "cat stance," a foundational, fighting stance that teaches defense and builds leg power.[128] On the bottom left (Image D), a "soft Chinese style" practitioner "uses finger strikes" and a wing chun/wushu, bent knee stance to wound his opponent while protecting his weak spots from kicks.[129] The final panel (Image A) illustrates a judoka applying "chokes, pinning…and throws" to disable his opponent's breathing, principles that are central to the art.[130] The detail in these images demonstrates Dyson's familiarity with East Asian martial arts and their physical and non-physical benefits.[131] Though esteem of martial arts practice permeated CAP Brooklyn, the way Dyson situated martial arts within *YTT* for a young audience could only be done by someone with a certain background. Dyson was military veteran as well as a practitioner. Arguably, he hoped to both enthrall the children who colored the images and instill in them a passion for martial artistry's minutiae.

Below the panels, Dyson placed three questions. The first is "What is the code of Bushido. How does it relate to Black people in America."[132] "Bushidō" translates to "the way

[128] The word "karate" is written multiple times in Japanese kanji characters in the panel. Kanji characters are adopted from the Chinese character system. A fist rises conspicuously out of one instance, reminiscent of both a raised Black Power fist and the fist symbol used by certain karate styles like Goju Ryu Karate. Both figures are in karate *gi*s, or uniforms, and could be African American.

[129] Panel "D" is depicting a common kung fu/wing chun exercise technique building where two partners block, strike, and parry. The uniform is of note as it is a shirt and pants outfit that kung fu practitioners regularly wear called. Out of all the East Asian martial arts practiced in the US, many kung fu styles are also identifiable by the shoes they wear during practice, show here. This is not common in Japanese styles but is also common in taekwondo. The man on right side of this panel appears to have Black features and the man on the left could be Japanese or Black.

[130] The Japanese kanji characters for judo are also represented in the image with the Japanese flag sun in between them.

[131] The third question reveals what arts are shown, but you can also ascertain which are depicted by having knowledge of kanji. This is an intricate supplemental knowledge. Not all martial arts study includes study of original Japanese terms and the characters that signify them. For the East, this is a well-articulated and deeply thought out contemplation of martial arts. Dyson's knowledge of martial arts had to be very intricate. Goju, the karate style listed in the question, was among the most popular martial arts and karate styles found in New York City and still has a strong tradition in the Northeast. It was initially brought to the area by Peter Urban, an author and U.S. military man. An Okinawan karate style, Urban first learned the Japanese version of Goju while stationed in Tokyo and was given permission by his instructor to bring Goju to the United States. He, and subsequently his students, would teach hundreds of thousands of students between the 1950s and 1980s, some of whom became prominent Black karate practitioners. They include: Ron Van Clief, the founder of "Chinese Goju," mentioned in Chapter.. and the first black man to star in Hong Kong martial arts films; Ron Taganashi, an Afro-Boricua who co-founded the style of "Nisei Goju;" Shaka Zulu; and the founder of the Harlem Goju school system, Sam McGee. For Dyson to cite Goju Karate means that he interacted with an expansive, Black world of Goju. That world is a prominent example of how the U.S. military created space for Black students in urban communities to learn martial arts, particularly from people who looked like them.

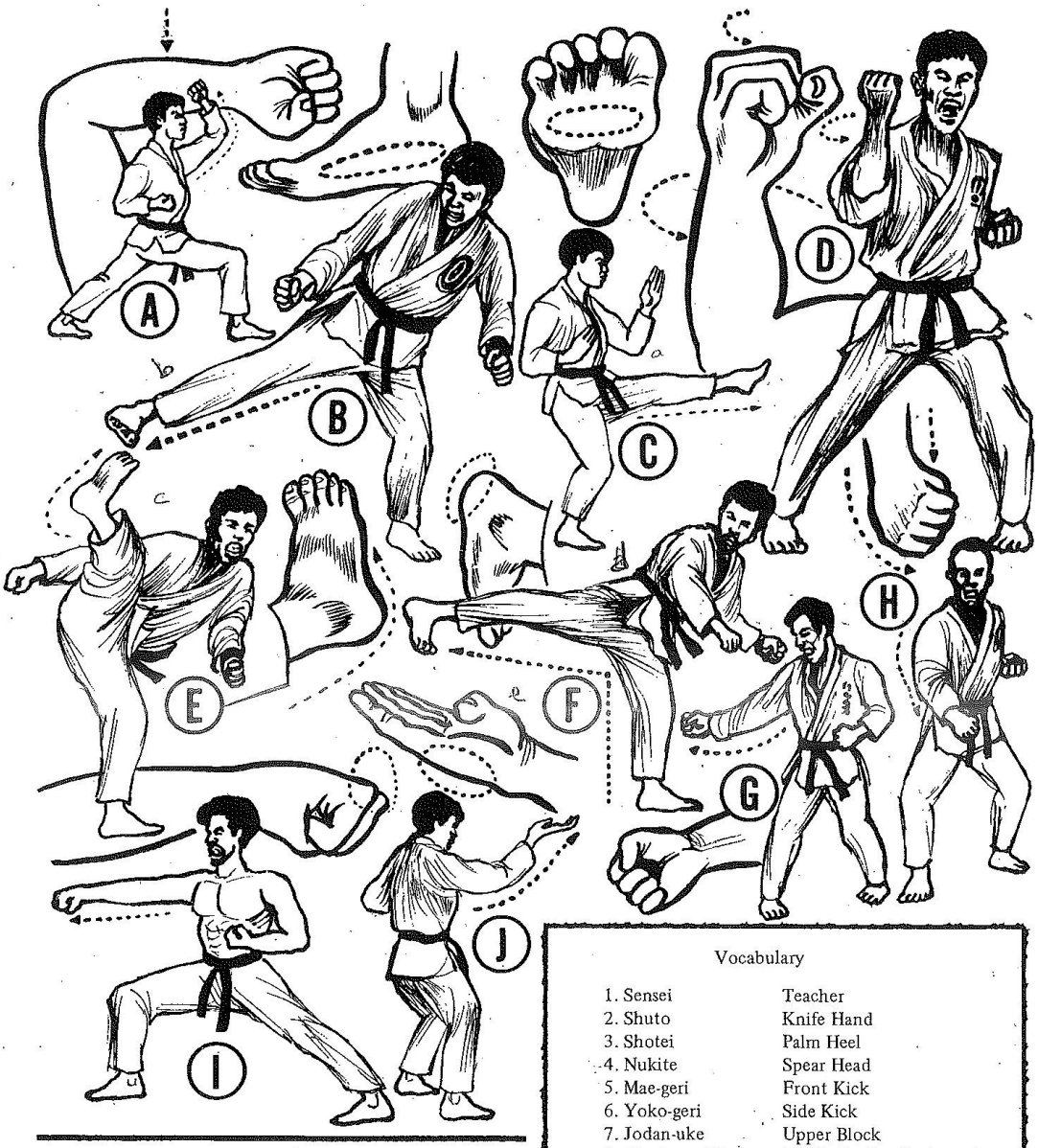
[132] Dyson, *Yesterday*, 14.

[dō] of the armed gentry [bushi]" but is more commonly known as the samurai or warrior code. If bushido related to Black People in the United States, it meant that warriorhood related to African Americans. This conceptualization makes sense if we take seriously that Black community organizers conceived of themselves as warriors who believed existing America was the equivalence of warring on a battlefield.

Also of note is Dyson's question, "What is the purpose of Meditation & Spiritual Development as related to: a) the Martial Arts b) everyday living."[133] The act of Dyson asking this question harkens again to a shared belief amongst CAP instructors that spirituality was embedded in community organizing. The ability to relax, be "physically at ease," and gain spiritual enlightenment[134] helped form a "Black spirit" that was in control of an independent "Black body."[135] These were practical "everyday living" skills for future, Black liberation leaders. The "Martial Arts/Mental & Physical Development" series taught these skills in a manner that the activities covering histories of the Mau Mau uprising and Carter G. Woodson would not have. The martial arts pages thereby brought a necessary and distinct nationalist quality to the booklet, blending spiritual fortitude, physical resistance, and mental dexterity.

Advancing beyond racially ambiguous figures on page one, the series' second page (Figure 2-3 below), features a Black man with an afro demonstrating techniques. Like Maasi's usage of kupigana ngumi, Dyson artistic choice integrated martial artistry into the youth's cultural reflections of themselves. This process entailed a complete engrossment in all aspects of martial arts. When Dyson prompted children to match terms for blocks and strikes to the body

[133] Dyson, *Yesterday*, 14.
[134] Peter Urban, *The Karate Dojo: Traditions and Tales of a Martial Artist* (Boston: Tuttle Publishing, 1967), 28.
[135]See Nathan Hare, "Brainwashing of Black Men's Minds."



4. Match up with the above a) Front kick b) Side kick c) Roundhouse kick d) Back kick e) Knife hand f) Reverse punch g) Inverted fist h) Middle block i) High block j) Lower block

5. What is Tai-Chi; (Explain)

6. Name the techniques used for self defense on self defense page (page 31) ■

Vocabulary

1. Sensei	Teacher
2. Shuto	Knife Hand
3. Shotei	Palm Heel
4. Nukite	Spear Head
5. Mae-geri	Front Kick
6. Yoko-geri	Side Kick
7. Jodan-uke	Upper Block
8. Chudan-uchi-uke	Middle Inside Block
9. Gedan-bari	Lower Block
10. Juji-uke	Cross Block
11. Ibuki	Breathing
12. Tae-kwon-do	Karate Style
13. Goju	Karate Style
14. Zen Meditation	Spiritual Development
15. Tai-Sabaki	Movement Control

15

Figure 2-3 Cartoon, *Yesterday…Today and Tomorrow,* Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Table 2-3 Answer Sheet to Question 4 above. Answers and details filled out by author.

A	f) Upper Block (A head block from a forward leaning stance. It is known as "Jodan-uke" in Japanese, which is listed as #7 in the vocabulary word bank.)
B	b) Side Kick (A kick that snaps through the kneecap. It is known as "Yoko-geri" in Japanese, which is listed as #6 in the vocabulary word bank.)
C	a) Front Kick using ball of foot (A forward thrusting kick that strikes with the ball of the foot. It is known as "Mae-geri" in Japanese, which is listed as #5 in word bank.)
D	h) Middle Inside Block (An inside, forearm block. It is known as "Chudan-uchi-uke, which is listed as #8 in word bank.)
E	c) Roundhouse Kick (A kick that strikes with the instep and/or shin)
F	d) Back Kick (A backward kick that uses the heel to strike)
G	g) Inverted Fist (A punch that strikes with the palm facing upwards)
H	j) Lower Block (A low block using the outside of forearm)
I	f) Reverse Punch (A punch that uses the momentum of thrusting one hand backward to propel the opposite hand forward into a punch)
J	e) Knife Hand (A strike that uses the pinky side of the hand to strike like a blade. It is called a "Shuto" in Japanese and is listed as the second word in the Vocabulary bank)

parts that execute them, they had to differentiate moves such as the side kick and the back kick. Though both kicks utilize a fully extended leg, turned hips, and a thrusting hip rotation, nuances exist between the directions and angles used to implement them. These differences are not explained on the page. The child's education had to include martial arts study in order to tell.

"Spiritual Development" also reappears in this activity. Though listed in the word bank, it is the only term that does not name a style or a physical technique. It immediately registers as an incorrect choice for the activity, but even selecting it as a wrong answer emphasizes student's need to be familiar with its definition. "Spiritual development" occurred in each CAP chapters' iteration of martial arts practice. None of them treated martial artistry solely as self-defense, but

also as an artistic expression and educational tool. The second activity question, "What is Tai chi; (Explain)," builds on this relationship. Tai chi is a rich, self-defense oriented, martial art but U.S. practices of it stress its contemplative nature. Overall, one cannot think about the word bank without noticing how each term is listed in both English and Japanese. For example, spiritual development is understood as meaning "Zen meditation." The reverence for original Japanese words, which are not always directly translatable, was common among many, but not all, martial arts schools. This was not simply an orientalist adaptation of martial arts. Dyson ensured students learned CAP's belief in Afro-Asian solidarity, its indebtedness to East Asian-descended spirituality and practice, and its commitment to non-Eurocentric philosophies and politics.

Dyson's concentration on thorough, analytical comprehension flows into the page's final question.[136] It instructs the reader to identify the techniques deployed on the series' last page (See Figure 2-4 below). On page 31, readers see the figure of a calm, Black woman replace the tense bodies of men in previous drawings. She walks alone sporting an afro like the Black man from the previous page. Two men stalk her while a third lurks behind a corner. The men expect to "rip" her off in both senses of the word: 1) to rob her for "money ta git sum smack [heroine]" and 2) to easily get some "trim," i.e. sexually assault her.[137]

Dyson's word choice was just as meticulous as his visuals. His opening narration states, "In today's time of nation building…many Black women are being ripped off in our

[136] It is interesting to note that there are 10 images but 15 terms in the vocabulary word bank box on the right-hand side of the page. Also, some of the techniques represented in the images are not listed in the word bank. The extra 5 terms seem to indicate that, while they are not depicted, are still important for a student of martial arts to understand. Out of all the terms listed in the bank, it is also interesting to note that #12 and #13 are the only martial arts styles listed. Dyson also correctly named Goju as a style of karate, but erroneously noted taekwondo as a style of karate as well. Taekwondo is not technically a karate style, though a modernized version of Korean martial arts that was influenced by the modern development of karate. This could be a generalization for the sake of the exercise, as his expertise would signify that he would know otherwise. But these two styles would be highly appropriate to list. Though judo was perhaps the first prominent or widespread practiced martial art in the U.S., by the 1960s and 1970s, forms of karate, specifically Goju, became very prominent. But taekwondo would spend the latter half of the 20th century growing into the martial art with the most schools across the country. As an additional note, "Zen Meditation" is also on the list, joining "Tae-kwon-do" and "Goju" as the only nonphysical action terms listed in the term box.
[137] Dyson, *Yesterday*, 31. Trim is referencing her genitalia.

Figure 2-4 Cartoon, *Yesterday…Today and Tomorrow,* Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

communities by sick brothers. One cure for this is knowledge of martial arts…it teaches…spiritual and mental control and self-defense."[138] The attackers' politics echo those of

the Black police officer in Greenlee's novel, re-illustrating that Black people who enact intra-community violence were not allies for the East. By periodizing this tension within a moment of "nation building," Dyson utilized a common CAP refrain to distinguish who was and was not enlightened enough to build a sociocultural and political "nation" within Black communities.[139]

As the comic progresses, the heroine executes a series of defensive and offensive moves to dispatch the first two attackers.[140] When the final thug approaches from the shadows, he exclaims, "I got her," and raises a trash can high above his head. In turn, she breaks through him with a well-placed back kick to the solar plexus and shouts, "Kiai!" Martial arts master Peter Urban defined the kiai as an "explosive forcing out of the breath in the form of a loud, intensely piercing yell or scream, propelled by the muscles of the lower diaphragm."[141] The heroine's kiai signifies that, at "the exact moment of impact," she cleared her "mind of fear" and committed to her strikes."[142] While screaming a verbal kiai, she also implements a "kiai of the eyes" or "cat-eyes power."[143] When her eyes reflect power, her attackers' eyes reflect fearful awe. When the kiai develops as fully as the heroine has developed it, it is theorized by martial artists to cause "the mind and the body…to do the seemingly impossible without realizing it," simply through willpower.[144] From the perspective of Dyson, a kiai trained Black minds and bodies to concentrate on protecting and maintaining their worth and importance.[145]

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[138] Dyson, *Yesterday*, 31.
[139] See Woodard, *A Nation within a Nation*.
[140] While both the side kick and back kick are depicted in the previous activity, neither the elbow nor the hip throw are shown above or given a vocabulary word. This again marks that a student had to be familiar or become familiar with martial artistry as a part of their education at the Uhuru Sasa Shule.
[141] Urban, *The Karate Dojo*, 48.
[142] Urban, *The Karate Dojo*, 48.
[143] Urban, *The Karate Dojo*, 49.
[144] Urban, *The Karate Dojo*, 49.
[145] Each part of the martial arts series can be brought back to the idea of training or honing one's skills. Masters like Urban believed that all martial arts practitioners needed to develop the art of complete relaxation and to use their spiritual training in every aspect of their daily lives. As he states, "Profound personality changes occur as new students develop fighting ability. The introvert finds that he has become brave, the overly aggressive personality becomes calm. Karate training has the power to destroy neurosis and integrate and broaden the character. Confidence becomes evident in students' everyday living." See Urban, *The Karate Dojo*, 28.

Even though Dyson's attention to technique is vital to understanding his views, what is most compelling about the comic strip is how it positions Black organizing and sexual assault. Black Power and Black nationalist activists endure being portrayed as being overwhelmingly sexist and misogynist. This narrative ignores when they reimagined their approaches to sexual and bodily integrity for women. Though often projecting traditional gender roles onto women in the beginning, CAP's later politics empowered women to protect themselves instead of needing a Black Nationalist protector. This departs significantly from the Nation of Islam's early belief in a protector masculinity and how it would suffice to defend Black women and their bodies.

The image of the female Black martial artist coincided with transitions within CAP and US that occurred during the transition from the mid-1960s to the political shifts of the late 1960s and early-1970s. A different type of Black Nationalist political ethos emerged: the impossibility of protecting a Black woman's body after centuries of violation could be rectified by training, relaxation, and by a "sister" herself. As Ashley Farmer notes, years after Mfundishi Maasi's original classes, CAP Newark's women learned self-defense, particularly how to use guns, as a part of their "ongoing efforts to reimagine black womanhood."[146] Even the US organization, which heavily practiced sex-segregation and conservative gendered roles, shifted their approach to self-defense after the organization suffered from FBI repression and conflicts with other groups like the Panthers. Women's involvement in security, Scot Brown argues, helped usher the US "from a doctrine of male supremacy to its acceptance of gender equality in the early seventies."[147] Post-1969, women in US began to take up roles within "intelligence and security

[146] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 122-123. Amina Baraka has alluded in an interview that women started to practice martial arts in Newark's CAP during the 1970s. This interview was conducted by Janée Moses, Ph.D., for her dissertation defended in the Department of American Culture at the University of Michigan. It is entitled, "A House to Sing in: Extraordinary/ordinary Black Women's Narratives about Black Power" (2020).
[147] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 122-123.

detailing, jobs that US members previously considered to be the purview of men."[148] Furthermore, the women's cadre, Matamba, underwent "an elaborate martial arts and weapons training program."[149] Named after a kingdom whose queen fought Portuguese colonizers, the Matamba were central to US's survival strategy during its "crisis" years. Because of their own ideas of masculinity and the media and police's perception of gender hierarchies, US men "were well known and regularly search and harassed by the police."[150] The Matamba deepened the security apparatus at a time when it was necessary to sustain day and night details for Karenga's home.[151] This suggests that the men in US were forced by political repression and climate to see women as physically capable protectors. Rather than increase the perception that women were inferior, self-defense and physical training diminished it.[152]

Not only were CAP's gender politics shifting but the nation's activist landscape was shifting. Both CAP's gender-inclusive classes and Dyson's female-centered comic came out during concurrent activism within the antirape movement and 1970s women's self-defense organizing. Two years after Dyson drew his graphic, in 1974, Annie Elman and Nadia Telsey, founded the Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts, which organized support for Black women who fought back against attackers.[153] As Scholar Emily Thuma notes, groups such as San Francisco's Women Against Rape (SFWAR) and Boston's Cell 16 theorized "physical self-defense tactics" as

[148] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 100. Farmer cites pages 124-125 of Maulana Karenga's piece, "Black Liberation Movement."
[149] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 122-123.
[150] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 123.
[151] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 122-123.
[152] While this is indeed a progressive shift, it is important to note that this period marked a moment where parts of the L.A. Black community became less trustful of US. And instead of using repression as an opportunity to complete more community engagement projects and more non-security related education, many US members turned to a life of protecting an organization that found itself marked as intimidators. They found themselves "isolated and vilified" and losing allies. See Brown, *Fighting for US*, 122-123. This would suggest they were forced by circumstance to see women as physically capable protectors.
[153] It is now the Center for Anti-Violence Education located on the borders of the Gowanus and Park Slope neighborhoods of Brooklyn.

militant, grassroots alternatives to relying on law enforcement for women's protection.[154] For groups who prioritized this, self-defense training meant "affordable," martial arts-based classes that tackled interpersonal, social, and structural power differentials between men and women. The manner in which they aimed to transform women lives through martial arts mirrored the Black Power Movement's attempts to use martial arts to "unbrainwash" Black people of inferiority. CAP's classes, and those of the Panthers for that matter, underline that martial arts practice existed as a point of overlap and mutual influence between the women's movement and the Black Power movement. Of course, neither organizing for the protection of Black women nor against sexual assault was new.[155] Black women's participation in martial arts classes and the antirape movement stood in the legacy of Black women activists such as Ida B. Wells and Rosa Parks that called attention to the sexual terror experienced by Black women during the 19th and 20th centuries.[156]

Activists, specifically Black men, did not always discuss intra-community violence against women, though countering this violence was involved in the conceptual work of the Nation of Islam.[157] While the attackers in Dyson's comic are Black, the perpetrator of violence against Black women are not considered "conscious" Black men. They are painted as men who did not accept Black Power politics, though sexual assault existed inside Black Power organizations. Simultaneously, it is also possible that comic's heroine is a gendered metonym of the Black

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[154] Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 45-46.

[155] For information about white women in the US who learned judo and jujutsu moves during the early 20th century Women's Rights Movement, see Wendy Rouse, *Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2017). For more on late 20th century women's activism and "physical self-defense" and martial arts classes, see Martha McCaughey, *Real Knockouts the Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

[156] For more, see books such as Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), Jeanne Theoharis, *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), Danielle L McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), and Thuma, *All Our Trials Prisons*.

[157] See Chapter 1 for more on the complexities of sexual assault within the Nation.

community deployed by a male author. As a metaphor for Black America, with its history of being pillaged and abused, she would represent the radical potential for the community to shed the mental and legal chains that bound it to subservience. In this way, the protection of women against sexual assault mixed both conservative and radical politics. Even with this mind, it was poignant imagery that, although male characters symbolized the power of martial artistry inside a dojo, a Black woman realized it in the street.

The graphic's existence begs us to avoid minimizing the nuances of gender and sexuality in CAP and the East. There were both signs of progress and problems in the organization. For example, during the last years of Uhuru Sasa Shule, after Jitu Weusi stepped down, it was steered by headmistress Mama Lubaba Ahmed. Under her, students learned self-defense alongside heterosexism that proffered "homosexuality" as well as "broken homes" as problems plaguing the Black community.[158] This notwithstanding, martial arts and print culture call us to rethink gender and politics in the East and other CAP branches. Fittingly, Dyson ended his heroine's story by repeating the language of "spiritual and mental control." The attacker with a busted knee hotly remarks, "I told ya not ta f… with that one." This is both a message to his cronies and the audience: a "sister" equipped with self-defense and consciousness is not to be trifled with.[159] The ending note, which reads "all of the techniques above are not difficult to master," encapsulates the East's inclusive approach to martial arts study. Across age and gender, martial arts classes were involved in various East programming because they taught practical skills, relaxation, and spiritual grounding. Poetically, the repetition in *YYT* mimicked the real-world repetition of skills that one needs to become a proficient martial artist and organizer.

[158] Rickford, *We are an African People*, 251.
[159] For more on how "this sister" becomes a popular culture icon and how Black women transition into the "women not to be messed with" as part of internal cultural empowerment, see Chapter 4. For more on how that same "sister" becomes a source of painting Black women as an increasing threat to law enforcement, see Chapter 4 as well.

IV. Conclusion

The inclusion of martial arts as part of a holistic and pragmatic approach to self-defense, both gender and age-inclusive, counters the idea that cultural nationalists provided impractical answers for navigating Black Americans' lived experiences. In CAP, activists used martial arts praxis as a form of cultural transformation, as immediate liberation, and as preparation for future political liberation. Martial arts study further counters assumption that they, unlike "revolutionary nationalists," did not prepare for theoretical revolutionary struggle in the United States. As historian Algernon Austin states, "'cultural' Black nationalism was not seen as antithetical to violent, revolutionary struggle."[160] CAP's "cultural nationalism involved more than the "arts or…recreating African traditions."[161] Just as "O" stood for Organizer," in the East's alphabet for children, "D stood for "Defend." [162] Because of the work of Pan-Africanists in Kenya and Angola, the idea of revolutionary war against a colonial state felt very possible for some. An analysis that attends to all the ways these activists prepared for physical struggle, including how seriously they took self-defense practice, better contextualizes Karenga's interpretation of Malcolm X and postcolonial African leaders.[163] In order to prosper, Kawaida-inspired "cultural nationalists" believed with conviction as Karenga did: that they needed "a cultural revolution before the violent revolution."[164] It would be suicide to revolt without the

[160] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 104.
[161] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 105.
[162] Austin, *Achieving Blackness*, 102. Austin cites the publication, *The Weusi Alfabeti* ("The Black Alphabet"), from Uhuru Sasa Shule, Inc.
[163] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 23. Malcolm X wrote "We must recapture our heritage and out identity if we are ever to liberate ourselves from the bonds of White Supremacy. We must launch a cultural revolution to unbrainwash an entire people" in his "Statement of Basic Aims and Objectives of the Organization of Afro-American Unity." It can be found in *New Black Voices: An Anthology of Contemporary Black Literature*.
[164] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 23. Quote originally from page 11 of *The Quotable Karenga* by Clyde Halisi and James Mtume, published in 1967.

"identity, purpose, and direction" provided by "total cultural and spiritual upheaval and revitalization."[165]

By taking martial arts seriously within the history of 20th century Black political organizing culture, we better understand how spirituality aided community organizers. This rescues the spiritual self-determination work of "cultural nationalists" and allow us to see that work as a serious mode for liberation. Since CAP instructors wanted to train individuals who "moved beyond fear" and remained "compassionate as well as disciplined," we can see the continuities of compassion-based activism that existed in nationalist frameworks. [166] Black women and men of this era injected ideas of compassion for humanity in Black Freedom organizing, just as Black Feminism called for.[167] Black Power fights for human equity were not divorced from this quality, despite hyper-focused calls for self-defense. Consequently, martial arts practice does more than change how we view "cultural nationalist" organizing, legacies of the Black Arts Movement, and the roles of women in CAP. It reminds us that community defense itself is inherently rooted in consideration and sacrifice for the sake of others.

[165] Brown, *Fighting for US*, 23. Quote originally from page 11 of *The Quotable Karenga* by Clyde Halisi and James Mtume, published in 1967.
[166] Mfundishi Maasi in discussion with the author, March 2013.
[167] Regardless of the moment that individual organizations began training women, we can situate martial arts practice within frameworks developed to maturity by 1970s Black and Women of Color feminist organizers, which will be discussed more in later chapters.

CHAPTER 3:

"Sports are for everyone. For the people": Fighting for Liberation through Martial Arts and Physical Education in the Black Panther Party

The Black Panther Party is often memorialized for its late 1960s calls for armed self-defense. Popular images of the Party include the 1967 photographs of co-founders' Newton and Bobby Seale standing armed outside their headquarters and the rows of Party members standing outside the California state capitol protesting their right to carry weapons. Books on the Panthers provide significant evidence on how party chapters trained members to use guns. Training was provided by a range of individuals: from the children of southern migrants who were taught to use firearms to military veterans who volunteered their skills.[1] In the 7th bullet of their 1966 original Ten-Point Program, Newton and Seale wrote that "the Second Amendment to the Constitution of the United States gives a right to bear arms. We therefore believe that all Black people should arm themselves for self- defense."[2] However, this mention of arms is the only one in the platform, and while armed police patrols were a substantial part of early Panther organizing in Oakland, Berkeley, and Richmond, California, focus on the Panthers' armed self-defense has overshadowed unarmed self-defense as a key component of their activism.[3] Attention to martial arts and combat sports within the Party gives more specificity to their self-defense programming

[1] For more, see Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 44, 139, and 187. Geronimo Pratt, a veteran who used his military skills to train the LA chapter

[2] Murch, *Living for the City*, 129.

[3] See Murch, *Living for the City*, 131-136.

and physical culture as well as highlights the vibrancy of the Party's mid to late 1970s organizing.

Out of all the organizations to rise during the Black Power Movement, the Panthers have received the most consideration in African American social movement historiography. Following a series of autobiographies that documented individual and organization experiences, including *A Taste of Power* (Brown 1992) and *Assata: An Autobiography* (Shakur 1987), the late 1990s saw the beginning of anthologies and texts that sought to recreate a holistic vision of the Party, resurrecting it from its outdated and polarizing public memory.[4] This included the collections *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]* (Jones 1998) and *In Search of the Black Panther Party* (Lazerow and Williams 2006). In the former, historians like Tracye Matthew foregrounded how scholars could interrogate the perceived gender dynamics in the Party and move beyond a narrative of suffocating misogyny. Later, Ericka Huggins and Angela LeBlanc-Ernest expanded upon how women were the strategists and backbones of the organization's programming and elucidated how they formed a unique approach to education.[5] Rethinking the Panther's relationship to gender, education, feminism, and physical culture has formed the crux of Mary Phillips' articles and upcoming book as well.[6] After almost two decades of Panther scholarship, full-length monographs have started to assess Panther women's leadership and its relationship to Black Power politics and shifts in sexual and feminist politics of the 1970s. Robyn Spencer's *The Revolution Has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party* (2016) lead the away

[4] Such works paved the way for later monographs. For example, see Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black against Empire: The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party Oakland* (University of California Press, 2016).
[5] See "Ericka Huggins and Angela D. LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education: The Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School," in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, ed. by Komozi Woodard, Jeanne Theoharis, and Dayo F. Gore (New York: New York University Press, 2010).
[6] Philips has several publications on the subject. For example, see Mary Phillips, "The Power of the First-Person Narrative: Ericka Huggins and the Black Panther Party," *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (2015): 33-51, https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2015.0060 and Mary Phillips, "The Feminist Leadership of Ericka Huggins in the Black Panther Party," *Black Diaspora Review* 4, no 1, (Winter 2014): 187-221.

alongside Ashley Farmer's *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (2017).

In addition to necessary examinations of political culture and gender, texts prioritized analyzing the party from the local level by focusing on case studies in cities like Chicago.[7] Equally as important, books teased out understudied facets of the Panther's backgrounds organizing. Donna Murch's *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (2010) smartly illuminated how members' youth incarceration, Southern family roots, and enrollment in California public colleges informed their philosophies. *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* represented a wave of texts interested in how the Panthers commitment to aesthetics shaped their and subsequent generations (Ongiri 2009). Meanwhile, in *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (2011), Alondra Nelson broke ground by focusing on the Panther's understudied yet painstaking participation in health justice organizing.

Within these texts on the Party, sports and physical education still receive an insignificant amount of attention. The Black Power era encompassed vibrant sports activism, yet texts that discuss Black Power athletics focus heavily on the Olympic Project for Human Rights.[8] While other texts have discussed the role of race and political advocacy within the careers of Muhammad Ali, Curt Flood, and Bill Russell, there have been few monographs that grapple with

[7] For example, see Jakobi Williams, *From the Bullet to the Ballot: The Illinois Chapter of the Black Panther Party and Racial Coalition Politics in Chicago* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).
[8] See Harry Edward, *The Revolt of the Black Athlet*e, (New York: Free Press, 1969); Amy Bass. *Not the Triumph but the Struggle: The 1968 Olympics and the Making of the Black Athlete* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and Douglas Hartmann, *Race, Culture, and the Revolt of the Black Athlete: The 1968 Olympic Protests and Their Aftermath* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

the breadth of athletic activism in Black Power organizations during the late 1960s and 1970s.[9] Fewer works still have concentrated on Black women as athletes and political agents that fundamentally change American sports history, though crucial work by Amira Rose Davis has begun to change this.[10]

Moreover, within Black Freedom studies, there has been discussion of African Americans' armed self-defense in *Radio Free Dixie* (Tyson 1999), *We Will Shoot Back* (Umoja 2013), and *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed (Cobb, Jr. 2014).* In *We Will Shoot Back*, Akinyele Umoja argues that Civil Rights activism in Mississippi would have been inconceivable without the support of local armed resistance advocates and that self-defense/armed resistance is central to understanding the fight for Black freedom. While Umoja's work on armed resistance is not limited to the usage of guns, neither it nor any other text within 20th century Black Freedom studies discusses at any length unarmed self-defense or hand-to-hand combat.

Therefore, building upon previous research, this chapter argues that looking at unarmed self-defense and martial artistry expands what we recognize as Black Panther Party self-defense. It also further develops what scholars see as the utility of sport practice within Black Power and highlights women's involvement. Methodologically, this chapter examines newspaper columns, oral history, and action photography to intervene in current scholarship. By analyzing the Panthers between 1974 and 1980, I locate martial arts within a holistic approach to physical

[9] Dave Zirin, *What's My Name, Fool?: Sports and Resistance in the United States* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2005); Louis Moore, *We Will Win the Day: the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Athlete, and the Quest for Equality* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2017); Aram Goudsouzian, *King of the Court: Bill Russell and the Basketball Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); and Abraham Iqbal Khan, *Curt Flood in the Media: Baseball, Race, and the Demise of the Activist-Athlete* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012).

[10] See Amira Rose Davis, *""Watch What We Do": The Politics and Possibilities of Black Women's Athletics, 1910-1970* (PhD diss., John Hopkins University, 2017), https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/2355993365?accountid=14667.https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/2355993365?accountid=14667.

education, health, and sports recreation within Black independent schools and community centers.

I. The Black Panther Party, Education through Movement, and the Rise of Martial Arts

As early as 1969, members of the New Haven and New York BPP chapters trained in martial arts.[11] In his autobiography *Panther Baby*, Jamal Joseph illustrates multiple instances where he taught or used his training in martial arts, such as when he taught fellow inmates while incarcerated as part of the Panther 21. While the Panthers grappled with their own internal sexism, unlike CFUN in 1968 and 1969, women learned the same revolutionary development skills, including unarmed self-defense. When Safiya Bukhari joined the Harlem office of the BPP in 1969, she read Mao Zedong for political education, learned how to build, break down, and use firearms, and took physical education classes. Physical education included "how you handled yourself physically, hand-to-hand combat, and your health-being physically fit...[and] basic martial arts, how to defend ourselves."[12] In an interview with Bukhari, Mark Holder recounted how he taught Assata Shakur martial arts in 1971 after they went underground in the wake up of the Panther 21 because "the need to acquire certain self-defense skills became more and more acute."[13] And despite his background, she "damn near kicked [his] butt."[14]

Though activity in New York demonstrates the Panthers long relationship with martial arts, martial arts usage in the Party reached its maturity in the mid to late 1970s when strong,

[11] See Richard S. Raya, "Might for Right: Martial Arts as a Way to Understand the Black Panthers," *Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities* 4, no. 1 (2015), https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/tapestries/vol4/iss1/7. Raya mentions that Alex Rackley (called Alex Raxley in Raya's text) served as a martial arts instructor in 1969 in New Haven. Rackley's murder lead to the New Haven Black Panther Trials. Men and women also practiced martial arts in Newark's Black Panther Chapter, though the date is unknown. Komozi Woodard, in person conversation with author, 2014.
[12] Safiya Bukhari, *The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, & Fighting for Those Left Behind*, edited by Laura Whitehorn (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010), 22.
[13]Bukhari, *The War Before*, 181.
[14] Bukhari, *The War Before*, 181.

women's leadership balanced electoral politics with an extensive health and wellness agenda. In fact, martial arts were a cornerstone of the physical education program at the Oakland Community School, the afterschool programming at the Oakland Community Learning Center, and the Panthers' survival programs. Between the Party's founding in 1966 and 1970, the party grew significantly and drew the systematic attacks of the FBI's COINTELPRO. When Huey Newton left jail after fighting a charge of manslaughter for 3 years, he shifted the focus of the organization. He de-emphasized its armed self-defense and military-like aspects in favor of highlighting self-defense through the principle of intercommunalism, which sought to re-emphasize the Party's efforts within a global struggle against empire and boost the arsenal of the Party's community survival programs.[15] Community survival programs recognized the need for communities to have an expansive toolkit to survive until an impending political revolution. These programs included the health clinics and programs, free breakfast and free food programs, Seniors Against a Fearful Environment (S.A.F.E), and the Intercommunal Youth Institute (IYI), which opened in 1971 to support the children of Panthers who suffered the impacts of COINTELPRO surveillance against their parents.[16] By 1973 and 1974, because of increased enrollment and rising desires to increase visibility, the school grew from a minor homeschool into a new building and new name, the Oakland Community School (OCS).[17]A part of a larger Black independent school movement that occurred during the Black Power era, the OSC taught "math, science language arts (Spanish and English), history, art, physical education, choir, and

[15] See Ashley Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 78. After Huey's release, the Party "abandon[ed] military-type titles that named its leadership." See Steve McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While: Back to Back in the Black Panther Party* (Maryland: PublishAmerica, 2008), 130.
[16] See "A Program for Survival," *The Black Panther*, July 21, 1975, 27. Microfilm; and see Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education: The Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School," 168.
[17] See Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education: The Black Panther Party's Oakland Community School," 168 and 170.

environmental studies" to anywhere between 50 and 150 students between 1974 and 1979.[18] It is within physical education that Steve D. McCutchen established an extensive martial arts program.

Years before migrating west to Oakland and integrating martial arts into the Panthers' community programming, McCutchen was born in West Baltimore in 1949. At 18, McCutchen learned he was classified as 1-A, or eligible for military service by the draft board. Just like CAP's James Johnson, he came of age at a time when young men went to college, entered the workforce, or faced drafting or volunteering for the service. McCutchen did not want to fight in a "War of Aggression in Vietnam" that exported "US Democracy."[19] Encountering H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael frustrated him because he had not been taught "about history and conditions of Black people, as they actually existed, outside of textbooks."[20] He was pushed to focus on academics and sports in school when many African Americans were "being locked out, locked up, shut up or ignored about their basic living conditions… about their survival and our basic right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."[21] Broken civil rights promises and the Party's stance on U.S. Imperialism and the draft attracted him, especially the 6th point of the Panthers' original 1966 Ten Point Program, which affirmed that Black men "should not be forced to…defend a racist government" or "kill other people of color in the world who, like Black people, are being victimized by the White racist government of America."[22]

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[18] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education," 170.
[19] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[20] Steve McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While: Back to Back in the Black Panther Party* (Maryland: PublishAmerica, 2008), 13.
[21] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 13.
[22] McCutchen's anxiety and fear of literal mental, emotional, and physical disfigurement that accompanied military service in Vietnam cannot be understated. He describes seeing young black men a few years older than him return from Vietnam "crippled, missing limbs, suffering from traumas, delusions, and then there were the ones that came back dead. He further says: I had played basketball and football, drank beer and wine in alleys with some of them, and now they were… useless or dead." Given what he calls his "history of being hurt or being injured during [his] youth," He fervently writes: "I believed, no, hell no…knew that I would not come back from combat in somebody else's jungles…alive." See McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 37-38.

Energized by the prospect of joining an organization that shared his politics, McCutchen joined the Baltimore chapter in November of 1968 and passionately declared if he were to engage in war, he would help "wage it against those who…use me and others as mere cannon fodder, as throwaways, or scapegoats for some illusion of democracy in Asia."[23] In other words, he would protest U.S. imperial violence that drafted young men, yet that did not give them equal access to state services.[24] Hallow promises of citizenship that asked for patriotism and patience were a "trap" that the U.S. government used to "convince black men to fight for someone else's freedom and serve the policy-makers of the country."[25] In contrast to state service, which felt like another form of oppression, self-drafting into the Black Panther Party appeared like an ideological utopia. Its "revolutionary black political" character and goals sold him.[26]

McCutchen spent several years in chapters along the east coast avoiding the draft and spent a significant amount of his time as a political education teacher.[27] He read and taught about the "secrets and atrocities of Empire," using "Marx, Engels, Lenin, Nkrume [sic], Fidel, Ho Chi Mihn [sic]…Kim II Sung, along with Du Bois, Garvey, Paul Roberson [sic], and Malcolm X."[28] Settling his time in the party required couching his desire to forgo military service in anti-imperialist sentiments globally. In the biography, he sees the struggle in Baltimore as similar to the "people of pre-revolutionary China [who] endured a period where they were led to establish their self-determination against British and Japanese domination."[29] In this way, he believed the "Black Panther Party had to begin a similar sojourn" in Baltimore as Third World Maoists

[23] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 37-38.
[24] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 38. He continues by saying that Black men who get drafted were seen as "some type of vicious creature[s], waiting to be summoned as though we were some of Pavlov's lab subjects."
[25] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 38. He states that this allowed them to "relegate actual freedom to the lyrics of songs or the words bellowed by "some tired hand-picked spokespeople."
[26] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 15,
[27] These included Philadelphia, New York, and New Haven. See McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*.
[28] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 74.
[29] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 42.

Marxists Leninists against a colonizer state.[30] Thus, McCutchen was an example of a Black man who did not learn martial arts while in the army but whose martial arts developed with an anti-imperialist, Black radical response to the US. Cold War military interventions Latin American, African, and Asian countries.

After COINTELPRO persecution and internal conflict forced party members from across the country to focus their organizing on Oakland, McCutchen began his lifelong practice of martial arts. In 1972, a year after the original IYI opened, McCutchen started his undergraduate studies at Grove Street College, now Merritt College, where Huey Newton and Bobby Seale met. Part of his studies was a tae kwon do class with several members of the security cadre, including Karl Colar, Harold Holmes, and Leonard Colar.[31] Though the members of the cadre were most likely there to further "tune their [self-defense] skills," McCutchen took the class because of general interest.[32] Karl Colar worked closely with McCutchen and introduced him to a "view of the martial arts that would apply to everyday use."[33] Master Ken Youn, the instructor who emigrated from South Korea in his early teens, taught the Tiger Style of tae kwon do, which unlike other variations of the art, emphasizes both powerful, fluid hand strikes and the fierce characteristic kicks of tae kwon do.[34] It also accounts for and seeks to prepare students for the uncontrolled nature of street fights while minimizing injuries.[35]

In 1974, McCutchen took a leap with his martial artistry. In August, the OCS staff met in preparation for the school year when McCutchen would instruct 1st-3rd grade math. He suggested martial arts classes be added to the curriculum and came prepared with a course

[30] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 42.
[31] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 141.
[32] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[33] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 141.
[34] As a remainder, tae kwon do is the same as Taekwondo. The writing of it can vary by period, sub-style, or instructor.
[35] Raya, "Might for Right: Martial Arts as a Way to Understand the Black Panthers," 5.

outline, volunteering himself to helm the school's sports education program. Approved by Elaine Brown, the only Chairwoman of the Party, the program began with "relative success with students and panther staff."[36] During the 1974-1975 year, McCutchen taught "10 sessions a week at the school, and two sessions a week after school" for the teens, "rapidly" becoming "a favorite of school officials, parents and students."[37] Though the OCS did not support a junior or senior high school, the Oakland Community Learning Center (OCLC) and its extracurricular programs were vibrant and soon teenagers inquired if they could take martial arts classes. After discussing it with Clark Bailey, the programs coordinator, McCutchen created a flier for a potential teenager martial arts program orientation. Forty inquisitive youth attended the initial meeting on October 22nd, 1974, barely 2 months after the OCS's program started. [38]

During the summer before the 1975-1976 academic period, *Black Belt* magazine ran a profile of the program. *Black Belt* was the leading self-defense publication in the world and maintained a circulation of 600,000 in 1975, with subscribers throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Japan.[39] The August 1975 issue of *Black Belt* magazine listed the article, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," as one of its features with a cover description that read, "Karatekas clean house in the Oakland ghetto."[40] It was written by Jim Hoffman, a freelance writer who visited the Party to profile the OCS and after, spotting McCutchen's class,

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[36] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 149.
[37] Jim Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," *Black Belt*, August 1975, 40-41, https://books.google.com/books?id=X9gDAAAAMBAJ&ppis=_c&lpg=PA41&dq=steve%20mccutchen&pg=PA41#v=onepage&q=steve%20mccutchen&f=false.
[38] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 149. McCutchen notes that Clark Bailey remarked to him afterward, "Boy, looks like you got a program here." McCutchen himself "thought that something was there, but [he] had no idea where it would lead."
[39] See *The Black Panther*, June 30th, 1975, 23.
[40] *Black Belt*, August 1975, cover page. It should be noted that McCutchen taught taekwondo. The magazine is applying the term "karateka, which refers to a student ["ka"] of karate, to anyone practicing a striking-based martial art.

asked Huggins and McCutchen if he could write a piece on the program.[41] To introduce the article and draw readers' attention, Hoffman used sensationalist rhetoric:

> "East Oakland, California is not a nice place to visit and you wouldn't want to live there. Most of what is bad about America is worse in East Oakland, and most of what is good about America isn't there at all. In East Oakland, unemployment, disease, illiteracy, crime, poverty and mortality are all on the heavy side of the national averages. There are few parks. For recreation there is only the street, a harsh terrain cluttered with the debris of a cruel and wasteful era-rows of deserted storefronts, shattered glass, broken people. Hardly the ideal environment for raising children."[42]

Though accurate in terms of decreased social services, this reading of East Oakland reflected audience expectations and followed the media's tendency to color the "urban ghetto" as a site of hopefulness and pity. It is interesting then that the introduction is followed by the sentence: "Much less a place where you would expect to find a school designed as a model of quality education for all communities-the poor and the privileged, the Black and the white."[43] Ironically, this suggests that, despite the conditions of deindustrialized East Oakland, with its outflux of wartime jobs and little funding for social programs, the OCS thrived. Although Hoffman prejudicially concluded that East Oakland was a "wasteland of human and material desolation," the Party's organizing proved that East Oakland was, in fact, not a wasteland but a vibrant community solving its own problems.[44] Because the OCS had grown every year since its founding and because the martial arts program experienced tremendous participation, Hoffman took seriously the idea that the OCS was "striving to create a model for those seeking an

[41] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 157.
[42] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 39.
[43] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 39-40.
[44] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.

alternative to the deteriorating institution known as the public school."[45] Indeed, throughout the 1970s, *The Black Panther* regularly reported on issues afflicting the Oakland Unified School district, including national and statewide low-test scores, mismanagement of funds, campus surveillance, poor student-teacher ratios, school violence, and teacher strikes.[46]

Usefully, Hoffman theorized a three-part framework for understanding why the program might have been popular and "ideal…for the school in many ways."[47] First, he identified the financial reality of operating an independent Black school. While the school's administrators and associate nonprofit, the Educational Opportunities Corporation, secured funding from parent contributions and grants, they could not cover salaries for the staff, let alone physical education costs.[48] Akin to the financial versatility of boxing, martial arts "require[d] no special playing field and, except for sparring gear, no special equipment."[49] Unlike other sports, at an organizational and grassroots level, combat sports created an escape from the burgeoning recreation income gap that affected equal access to physical education. The OCS's physical education model was surprisingly sustainable in the 1970s "at a time when many US school systems [were] canceling sports programs for lack of cash."[50]

Only after making this point did Hoffman raise the obvious point of the "immediate practical value of knowing self-defense."[51] Several of the teenagers joined the OCLC's program after "street fights with bigger opponents" and aimed to earn black belts.[52] McCutchen told his

[45] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 40.
[46] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education, 162-163 and 176.
[47] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 40.
[48] For more on OCS and OCLC funding, see Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 40-41; Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education," 170; and Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 265.
[49] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 40.
[50] See Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 40. *The Black Panther* regularly noted the obstacles facing public education in Oakland in 1970s, such as political fraud and mismanagement.
[51] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 40.
[52] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.

students, “You can walk around the corner from here and get chased home. There will be many times when you will have to fight or run. What you will learn here is that 'fight or run' doesn't mean the end of the world."[53]

> Still, Hoffman argued that a third reason truly explained the popularity of the program: “But perhaps the most important reason….is the philosophy of the school itself. Unlike traditional public schools where "discipline" means a set of rules, punishments and rewards that are imposed by teachers and authority figures, the Institute emphasizes internal discipline. The children progress at their own rate and it is not uncommon for a seven-year-old student to learn math with 10-year-olds and reading with five-year-olds. Because the children are not automatically advanced from year to year, they must develop the desire and discipline to learn within themselves.”[54]

This statement is beautifully intricate. While martial arts are sometimes considered to be regimented and strict, discipline was not solely achieved by external pressure in McCutchen’s programs. Instructor prompts could not propel a student toward individual growth without a personal desire to do so. The discipline at the OCS contrasted to the “memorization and drilling” of public schools, creating a space where “the children [were encouraged] to express themselves freely, to explore, and to question the assumptions of what they [were] learning, as children are naturally inclined to do.”[55] According to director Ericka Huggins, the school received “children who were labeled hyperactive, educable retardates and all kind of crazy things” yet upon enrollment, they “just blossom[ed] into the flowers that they really” were.[56] Thus, internal

[53] Hoffman, “Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto,” 40.
[54] Hoffman, “Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto,” 40-41.
[55] Hoffman, “Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto,” 41.
[56] Hoffman, “Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto,” 41.

discipline through martial arts fit the OCS as a school that did not believe in traditional punitive measures nor ability assessments.[57]

Huggins believed that children needed discipline even if it was internal. She told Hoffman,

> "Steve's class was an immediate success. 'It's just beautiful to see children have this much interest in strengthening their bodies,' Ericka comments. 'Children don't know about discipline, but it's something they need. This is a way of helping them understand it through something they really like. Steve is a good teacher, too,' she continues. 'He's teaching them how to be responsible about karate, how to conduct themselves. We had a problem at first, people running around kicking at each other. But Steve sets an example of control. You never see him running around kicking people…Steve has what is necessary to make the kids have discipline, to learn,' says Ericka. 'I mean, look, the kids he works with would be robbing stores if they weren't here, not because they're innate criminals, but because there's nothing to do-not just in East Oakland but in this whole country-for black and poor children. Nothing.'"[58]

It also seemed important to Huggins that the OCLC was able to make space for the teenagers over 12 and 13 years old who could not officially enroll in OCS. She noted of the physical space: "This building is the only thing in East Oakland where kids can come and feel free to do whatever they want."[59] Her rhetoric harkened to and affirmed the goal of building institutions

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[57] See more on the OCS's relationship to assessment, see Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education." Overall, Hoffman's framework could apply to other Black liberation schools that taught martial arts. Budget and internal discipline would have been significant factors for an independent Black school. For example, a football program would cost significantly more and potentially lack a spiritual component. such as The East's Uhuru Sasa Shule in Brooklyn and the Clifford McKissick Community School in Milwaukee, which opened in 1967. See Rickford, *We are an African People*, 13, and Konadu, *A View from the East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

[58] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.

[59] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.

within Black communities. As she said, it was important to have a physical space that folks can enter, whether it is the Oakland Community Learning Center or the East Cultural Center. In the absence of state services or state-provided programs at schools, such spaces provided programming that was actually tailored to the needs of community children, programming that combated the fact there is "nothing to do….in this whole country-for black and poor children."[60]

The in-depth *Black Belt* feature helped popularize knowledge of the program. In addition, the Party advertised the OCLC's All Open Martial Arts Program (AOMAP) throughout the spring and summer of 1975 in *The Black Panther* (*TBP*). In spring and summer issues, McCutchen popped off the page. A photographed captured his side profile. Rooted in a defensive stance, he wore all black and stared off into the distance searching for an invisible opponent.[61] As a result of strategic ads like this, the number of students increased. A clear indication of successful marketing and exposure, the program jumped from Sunday afternoon and Monday nights to including Wednesday evenings by late September.[62] As the months passed, the program's location within the Panthers' political agenda was never lost. Ads laid on pages that stressed the importance of freedom to Black people the world over, including the violent nature of the jail system on Black life. Trying to present hope in the face of the bodily unfreedom presented by state, the self-described "model program" remained free as a source to heal through movement.

Overall, this holistic approach to physical education corresponded to the OCS's total rethinking of education. At the center and school, children practiced martial arts as well as yoga

[60] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.
[61] *The Black Panther* issues that include this ad are: April 5th, 12th, and 19, 1975; May 12 and 19; June 9, 16, 23, and 30, 1975; and August 18 and 25, 1975. The Jan 31, 1976 ad replaced McCutchen with a yin yang symbol and a student demonstrating a hoping kick. See Page 23 for all ads.
[62] All Open Martial Arts Program" Advertisement, *The Black Panther*, September 29, 1975. Microfilm. The 3rd day of practice on Wednesdays at 5:00pm. The Sunday time also changes to 12pm.

and dance.[63] We can think of these together as Black Power movement arts. As a term, I define movement arts as meditative, healing arts that allow the body to physically release and move through trauma, violence, and cultural and spiritual colonization. In creating such a release, practicing movement arts allows space to open for cultural and bodily autonomy. Given particular Black Power ideas about physical culture, movement arts provided more than just militaristic body development and character. They focused on generating body awareness and creative empowerment. As another form of re-education, enacting movement with children supported the curricular concern "that children learn how to think and not what to think."[64] Movement arts such as tae kwon do taught children how to learn embodied knowledge and trust their sense of body and corporeality. [65]

II. Third Worldism in Motion and Print: Bruce Lee, Socialism, and the Sports Liberation Movement in Panther Martial Theory

The success of the program was in part due to its unique stylistic and philosophic approaches. McCutchen combined Bruce Lee's martial philosophy, Jeet Kun, Do, with tae kwon do techniques. The hybrid style served the needs of McCutchen's students, whom he wanted to prepare for the "stress conditions on the streets."[66] An avid critic of "the traditional instructor," McCutchen claimed traditional tae kwon do held students back. He believed it taught free

[63] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 69. Hoffman writes: "The classes so far have concentrated on building strength and learning movements. The younger age groups study kata exclusively and the youngest study only yoga. This instruction is designed to reinforce the unity of mind and body. Many of Steve's younger students have not even realized that they are learning a fighting art."
[64] "O.C.S. Director EH Highlights Chicago Alternative Schools Conference," *The Black Panther*, June 19, 1976.
[65] Mary Phillips' scholarship offers more on yoga's relationship to the Panthers and Black Power. See Mary Phillips, "The Feminist Leadership of Ericka Huggins in the Black Panther Party," *Black Diaspora Review* 4, no 1, (Winter 2014), 215 and Mary Phillips, "New Approaches on Women's Narratives in the Black Panther Party," (lecture, Conversations in Black Freedom Studies: Women in the Black Panther Party, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York, March 3, 2016); For more on dance's relationships to Black Power, see Jasmine Elizabeth Johnson, "Dancing Africa, Making Diaspora" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 43-46, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/1669918202?accountid=14667.
[66] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 69.

sparing too late and prevented students from developing individual skills and the ability to switch their tactics for each fight. He claimed that students had to study "three to five years" in other schools before they "could keep [themselves] from being knocked on [their] behind[s]."[67] In a quote that could have hung from the doorways of the school, McCutchen exclaimed in his *Black Belt* interview, "Here we are teaching contemporary combat," combat against a person moving and attacking back. [68] This is why Jeet Kun Do's intervention was crucial for the AOMAP's curriculum. As a martial theory rather than art, it built upon Bruce Lee's training in arts such as wing chun. Lee considered Jeet Kun Do a distinct and superior method for fighting. He eliminated stand-alone blocks and replaced them with combinations of blocks, parries, and strikes. Each attack was a defense and each defense was an attack, augmenting the street-informed Tiger Style Tae Kwon Do that McCutchen learned from Master Ken Youn.

McCutchen's journey mirrored the emphatic critique Bruce Lee made when he distanced himself from other martial artists. While not a catalyst for McCutchen's martial artistry, Lee was one of many figures who aided the program, even if only as an ideal or shadow. His movies attracted youth to the program because "all the children admire[d]" him.[69] By the start of the program's second year, Lee had been dead 2 years, but his movies still circulated, allowing the school to use contemporary fanaticism around Lee to inspire and draw students. Lee's symbolism connected to the school's missions to harmonize internal discipline and external support.

According to Huggins, McCutchen modeled how "what went into Bruce Lee was a lot of hard, hard work, and that every human being needs internal discipline."[70] From McCutchen's

[67] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 69.
[68] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 69.
[69] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.
[70] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 41.

perspective, Lee's "thinking paralleled the party's" for a variety of reasons.[71] Given the Panthers' attention to Third World revolutionary ideals and Afro-Asian solidarity, the inclusion of Lee's style was also a strong fit. Scholars such as Vijay Prashad and Fred Ho argue that the visual representation of Lee's philosophy and style, immortalized in films like 1973's *Enter the Dragon*, presented a symbolic, anti-imperialist fighting style and solidarity. His collaboration with African American co-star, Jim Kelly, evidences this.

But the Panthers' relationship to Lee and, more important, the ideals he represented, went beyond Third World connections on-screen. It was rooted in values derived from socialist and leftist politics. Breaking from rules, rigidity, and unchecked traditionalism supposedly came from a Third World Marxist challenge of First World versions of elitism and authority. Both Lee and McCutchen upended authority in martial arts. Lee left Hong Kong before completing his wing chun training and then began teaching non-Chinese students at the disapproval of other instructors in his community.[72] McCutchen began the AOMAP before reaching black belt. As he traveled more in martial arts communities in California, other instructors scoffed and became enraged. He only received his provisional black belt recognition from the World Tae Kwon Do Federation in Fall 1975, a full year after the program started.[73] Both men broke the rules regarding who was master enough to be a head teacher. For them, a "primary purpose of knowledge [was] is to pass it on to others."[74] Waiting for an appropriate rank meant keeping

[71] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 153.
[72] For more on Lee's life, see works such as Charles Russo, *Striking Distance: Bruce Lee & the Dawn of Martial Arts in America*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019; Matthew Polly, *Bruce Lee: A Life*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2018; and Daryl Joji Maeda, "Nomad of the Transpacific: Bruce Lee as Method," American Quarterly 69, no. 3 (2017): 741-761. https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2017.0059.
[73] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Director Awarded," *The Black Panther*, October 18, 1975, 23, Microfilm. He had already received his black belt from his instructor at this point. However, he was the rank below black belt, red belt, when he began his classes.
[74] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Director Awarded," *The Black Panther*, October 18, 1975. Microfilm.

knowledge to oneself, but passing on and disrupting hierarchies of knowledge was central to the OCS and its defiance of the Oakland Unified School District. [75]

An anti-establishment, anti-capitalist, and anti-Western influence spirit may have been performed in Lee's films, but McCutchen deployed his day-to-day teachings and writings. His approach was evident in his column, "Martial Arts," which ran on the *Black Panther*'s Sports page from 1975 till 1977. McCutchen wrote in his first article, "A Flame in the Dark" that

> "For hundreds of years the Western world has spawned myths and sat doggedly on unchanging attitudes towards what is popularly labeled as karate, kung-fu or martial arts. Not only are there distortions among those not in tune with martial arts, but even among students and 'certified masters' of the many styles. There is a common attitude of "permanent tradition" and "one right way." The denial that all real things are subject to change and enrichment is not only a rampant condition in social orders, but in many traditional martial arts schools as well." [76]

Critiquing the "western world" and certain masters' commitment to tradition situated McCutchen's pedagogy within the Panther ideology, which decried Western social systems and modes of governance."[77] His mixture of martial arts practice and critical theory stemmed from the years he spent teaching political education within the Party. Consistently in McCutchen's writings, the political education teacher speaks through the martial artist. On March 1, 1975, he wrote,

> "Some systems claim to be 'complete' or 'separate from any known system.' Such ideas only indicate how incomplete and narrow are its practitioners. Can knowledge and

[75] O.C.L.C Martial Arts Director Awarded," *The Black Panther,* October 18, 1975, Microfilm.
[76] "A Flame in the Dark," *The Black Panther*, Feb 22,1975, 23. Microfilm.
[77] "A Flame in the Dark," *The Black Panther*, Feb 22,1975, 23. Microfilm.

> understanding be complete; packaged into a framework and marked 'Finished'? Only the shallow in mind seem to believe so. A system is only limited by its creators and sustainers.[78]

McCutchen critiqued systems of martial arts from the position of someone who critiqued society through the readings of Marx, Nkrumah, and Mao.

That same month, he tackled how martial arts and the system of capitalism collided in the U.S. during the late 20th century. He intervened in the debate about whether karate or kung fu was the superior martial art. Disinterest in answering the actual question, he said it had a "commercial value…which has [only] served to fill both movie theaters and the many martial arts schools throughout the United States."[79] Businesses exploited the idea that one martial art could trample another in order to entice students. McCutchen disagreed with this because it meant profits drove the consumption of a public good. Later that month, in an article about force and strength, he stressed his belief that martial arts schools increase their wealth through false advertising. His examples including hyperboles that claimed a style could turn a "'97 pound weakling'" into a "'fearsome fighter, able to overcome any opponent" with little to no strength or practice.[80] McCutchen stated this was a gross misconception contrived by "commercial interests in the U.S."[81] Ads and film cinematography elided the work that each student had to do to train their instincts. It was not the mystical magic of a martial art but learning how to properly contract muscles that allowed students to defeat people considered normatively stronger. In other words,

[78] "Historical Background," *The Black Panther*, March 1, 1975, 23. Microfilm.
[79] "Kung-Fu or Karate?," *The Black Panther*, March 15, 1975, 23. Microfilm.
[80] "Speed and Force," *The Black Panther*, March 29, 1975, 23. Microfilm.
[81] "Speed and Force," *The Black Panther*, March 29, 1975, 23. Microfilm.

the desire to take people's money cheapened students' experience and did not reflect "the real values of martial arts."[82]

Upholding this perspective, the AOMAP team performed at various events that foregrounded a capitalist and class critique, such as at the OCLC's 1975 December Festival. The team exhibited *katas*, or predetermined series of movements, that they created, showcasing the "skill and concentration required for martial arts" ingenuity.[83] They joined a lineup that included the powerful stepping of the Mighty Panther Drill Team, the young women's drill team, and a rendering of "To Be Young, Gifted and Black." Across the performances, the program's theme underscored how Christmas compounded "class inequity…as expressed through who has housing during the cold, who can afford gifts, etc."[84] As the night uplifted the brilliance of students' voices and bodies, it conveyed to the audience, "the greatest gift to humankind is freedom to live."[85]

Martial arts performances within such programming revealed the Panther's desire to use martial arts, sports, and physical education as part of their advocacy for a more just world. At this moment in Panther history, the world around them looked like it could become a socialist one. In July 1975, *The Black Panther* reprinted "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America" from the Liberation News Service. Conducted by journalists from the Radical Sports Center of New York City, the interview detailed how FBI and CIA investigations disrupted athletes' lives during the Cold War. The Scotts founded the Institute for the Study of Sports and Society for the "development of

[82] "Speed and Force," *The Black Panther*, March 29, 1975, 23. Microfilm. In other words, no martial art had the inherent ability to produce "a greater force than a lighter person."
[83] This is significant because in many styles, katas are only made up by instructors. Many schools only teach katas that grandmasters of the system developed. Others only practice those devised by the style's founder.
[84] "'Mighty Panthers' Drill Team Highlights O.C.S 'December Festival,'" December 27, 1975, 4.
[85] "'Mighty Panthers' Drill Team Highlights O.C.S 'December Festival,'" December 27, 1975, 4.

progressive ideas in athletics."[86] In the interview, Jack Scott discussed the sports liberation movement, which encompassed players striking against professional team owners and young girls fighting for the right to play Little League Baseball. He and his partner Micki Scott contended that sports were a space for manifesting socialist ideas. They saw activists in the sports liberation movement as a part of the vanguard, making sports accessible to all irrespective of age or gender. They rejected of the "passivity and unhealthy consumer lifestyle fostered by the [capitalist] system."[87] This language inverted American, nationalistic ideas about fitness and healthy bodies while still co-opting it. But the Scotts theorized that awareness of eating habits and "healthiness" contributed to "awareness…of where humankind is and how we can live harmoniously with nature and one another."[88] And though this narrative was not so distant from 19th century American transcendentalism, this form of health, politics, and nature came from theorizing a global, socialist, future. To intertwine sports and a futuristic, socialist turn, Micki Scott poignantly declared,

> "Let me start by saying there will never be any really meaningful change in sports until we're successful in changing society. Sports is both a reflection and a reinforcement of the dominant values of the system. As the system changes, so do sports. There's a time lag involved of anywhere from two to ten years. The civil rights movement wasn't caught up with until 1968 with the Olympic Commission for Human Rights and the demonstration by Tommie Smith and John Carlos in Mexico City. The counterculture

[86] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," *The Black Panther*, July 7, 1975, 23. Jack Scott co-wrote the book *Out of Their League* about the football player Dave Meggysey, who was followed by the CIA because of his participation in anti-war protests.
[87] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," *The Black Panther*, July 7, 1975, 23.
[88] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," *The Black Panther*, July 7, 1975, 23.

and antiwar movement came into sports as athletes began to re-examine the "win at any cost" philosophy of Vince Lombardi…and William Westmoreland."[89]

Smartly, Scott captured how sports liberation folded into a broader move to push the U.S. toward more "progressive" or socialist values. Sports, as a mirror to society's values, had the place to reinforce or challenge dominant social ideologies, regardless of how fast it got there. Important contestations emerge where society and sport meet. The visibility of the Tommie Smith and John Carlos protests echoed global, Black Power calls for equity and justice. The link between Vince Lombardi and William Westmoreland is crucial then. The Scotts made a claim that coaches took a militarized approach to sports and winning. Likewise, officers at the fore of the Vietnam War, such as Moreland, made war into a winnable endeavor, an endeavor that significantly increased U.S.-based martial artistry.[90] Thus, the counterculture and antiwar movements rejected militarized sport and sport-like war popularized by World War II, as discussed in the Introduction. They also rejected Cold War values of uncritical patriotism and nationalistic participation in both.

Because David Dubois and the editorial team chose to circulate such socialist ideas alongside sports and martial arts, the sports section extended the paper's challenge to rethink the U.S. approach to life. In other paper sections, such as the "Intercommunal News," articles not only critiqued U.S. politics and militarism, but provided alternate examples of liberation for U.S.-based Black people. Their international coverage continually, and sometimes uncritically,

[89] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," *The Black Panther*, July 7, 1975, 23.

[90] For more on Mooreland, see Craig R. Whitney and Eric Pace, "William C. Westmoreland is Dead at 91; General Led U.S. Troops in Vietnam," *The New York Times*, July 20th, 2005, https://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/20/world/asia/william-c-westmoreland-is-dead-at-91-general-led-us-troops-in.html. Mooreland who was the United States Military Assistance Commander (or Commanding General) in Vietnam from 1964-1968 and later the Chief of Staff for the Army. He was one of the big proponents for more American combat participation. Before commanding troops in Vietnam, he also served as the Superintendent for West Point between 1960 and 1963.

highlighted struggles of socialist and communist countries they perceived as models, from Zimbabwe to China and Cuba. The sports section often looked to the latter two in their coverage, covering everything from Cuban boxing and Chinese ping-pong championships.[91] The Scotts also looked to Cuba as an inspiration. In their interview, they were asked, "In Cuba, you had a chance to see sports as part of a more progressive social system. Would you tell us what you saw?" The Scotts responded that Cuba had ceased to be a "playground for rich American," who had previously made Cuba into a sporting arena for "prostitution, gambling, boxing and baseball." U.S. capital had bent bodies, resources, and athletes to its will.[92] But by the mid-1970s, the Scotts argued that Cuba transformed itself into a "society of mass sports participation." They witnessed women and girls participating in sports without gender discrimination. One young Cuban girl that Micki Scott spoke with could not imagine being ridiculed for "enjoying physical activity;" the label "tomboy" was not in her vocabulary of experiences.[93] Also according to the Scotts, Cuba learned to undermine the sports industrial complex because of its U.S boycotts. The country began making its own sports equipment and providing free access to goods.

The Panthers highlighted egalitarianism and gender inclusivity in Chinese sports as well. In the article, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," Dr. Paul Hoch, a professor of philosophy Montreal and a regular contributor, insisted that China reduced superstar individualism and valued collaboration. [94] It reminded athletes that the "leisure and freedom to play the game comes as a consequence of the hard industrial and agricultural work of

[91] For example, see The Black Panther issues from February 22, November 6, and November 13, 1975.
[92] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," *The Black Panther,* July 7, 1975, 24.
[93] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," *The Black Panther,* July 7, 1975, 24.
[94] Paul Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 23 and 26. Dawson College is in Montreal.

many of other people."[95] In fact, Hoch argued that people, regardless of age and gender or background, opposed the elitism in "Western and Soviet sports."[96] Similarly to how martial arts was a sport of choice for the OCLC's own socialist physical education, Hoch details that every morning "parks…full of people from eight to eighty-years-old" practice exercises from calisthenics, tai chi ,and wushu.[97] They divided the roles of exercise leaders "to break down the distinctions between leaders and led."[98] Similar to what the Scotts observed in Cuba, Hoch called attention to the drive to break down gender barriers as well. He noted men and women "equally" played certain sports like "wushu, basketball, and track and field," and that, "unlike in the West, Chinese sports do not separate the boys from the girls" nor use them as a "covert school for sexism."[99] Mao's goals of mass participation and mass healthiness included allowing girls to "develop their physical strength through athletics, and in general [to] develop an active, assertive orientation towards both sports and life."[100] Attention to women's participation in socialist countries reflected how women had pushed the Party to rethink equitable gender practices. And to a socialist Third World, martial arts like tai chi and wushu were important gender inclusive physical activities.[101]

In AOMAP performances, the Panthers lauded China for such socialist ideals. For instance, on September 27, 1975 in San Francisco, the team performed Third World, pro-

[95] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 23.
[96] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 26.
[97] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 26.
[98] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 26.
[99] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 23.
[100] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 23. The article goes on to claim that women are "Whether in sports or in work or in politics, they are fully involved." It is, of course, a dubious assertation to be attributed to any country.
[101] As in other articles written by or reprinted by the Panther newspaper, Hoch's words rang naively around China, as if socialism had eliminated its class, leadership, and hierarchy dilemmas. In one paragraph, he wrote, "Hundreds of millions of workers and peasants involved in programs of daily physical exercise on their communes and factories." Hoch did not acknowledge that issues the Panther Party wanted to combat in the US, like structural poverty, were still prevalent in Chinese society, despite how accessible sports were made by decisions like building "hundreds of thousands of basketball courts." Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 23.

socialist solidarity at the People's China Celebration, which celebrated the 26th anniversary of the Republic's founding. They were invited to perform by the U.S.-China People's Friendship Committee after an impressive performance at the Oakland Black Expo in Mosswood Park. At the expo, teenagers Fred Morehead and Billy Owens lead 14 students in front of approximately 1000 viewers.[102] Other Third World solidarity performances unsurprisingly included one that praised Hong Kong and Seattle's Bruce Lee and demonstrated "problem solving" and "survival" in the streets."[103] In this way, Panthers used martial arts to link their fate to the larger fate of antiracism and the success of socialism outside of the U.S.

III. Becoming a Survival Program: Toward Martial Arts as Community Engagement, Love, and Selfhood

When the AOMAP began its ascent among the OCS and OCLC's programming, *The Black Panther* conversed with Steve McCutchen about martial arts and the Party's organizing and politics:

> *The Black Panther*: Why did you get involved in martial arts, particularly TKD [taekwondo], and how does it relate to your politics as a Black Panther Party member?
>
> Steve McCutchen: If we assume that, politics is a method of reaching certain goals for the individual and the group, then we can say that martial arts is basically the same idea. The individual, through certain learned performances and abilities, applies those abilities to first himself, then to others around him to affect the group so the group as a whole can move to learn and create, to add to their overall experience. My involvement in the martial arts is a continuation of my past athletic experiences in boxing, track, wrestling

[102] "Learning Center Martial Arts Team Performs At Black Expo," *The Black Panther*, September 1, 1975, 7 and "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Team At People's China Celebration," *The Black Panther,* October 6, 1975, 3.
[103] "'Bruce Lee Celebration' At Sunday Forum," *The Black Panther*, January 17, 1976, 5.

and other sports in school and with my family. The martial arts field seemed to me to be a field which puts together all my other athletic experiences.

TBP: How do you apply martial arts to your everyday living [?]

SM: In martial arts you take the basic principles and make them an extension of your personality and direct them into your particular field of activity on a day-to-day basis.

TBP: How does this help your organizing efforts as a Black Panther Party member?

SM: Well, the effects of TKD gear an individual toward control and confidence that doesn't have to be openly asserted. Through serious study and practice one increases his proficiency. As with the Black Panther Party, one is constantly trying to motivate others to become involved. So through this aspect, martial arts, I have a focal point through which I can [build] a concrete program [that] develops the individual who, in turn, is able to motivate others toward this program, which serves the community.[104]

The conversation illustrated how the AOMAP bonded politics and martial arts by combining individual growth and group growth, twin organizing components in the Party. As a politic, Party members underwent self-development in order to help others. The desire for community development and self-determination created pathways for martial arts practice to apply to "everyday living." Just like Jim Dyson stated in his youth cartoons at Brooklyn's East Center, martial arts principles related to other daily activities, whether youth became full time organizers or simply found respite in martial artistry from life's challenges. From both a CAP or Panther viewpoint, martial arts nurtured students physical and emotional needs.

Serving mostly East Oakland's 7 to 17-year-old Black population, AOMAP's participants became a part of the Party's fabric. As McCutchen noted in the same interview, the students

[104] "Interview with Steve McCutchen, Director of the Community Learning Center Martial Arts Program," *The Black Panther*, August 18, 1975, 23.

grew because they assisted other programs, "helping the Learning Center serve the people, in ways that interest[ed] them."[105] Students developed because they did not "separate martial arts from their [lives], and when their martial arts class stop[ped], their adherence to the principles of martial arts [did] not."[106] Teaching control, confidence, and self-improvement to youth served the community. Among the many programs that sought to serve the party and community, the AOMAP taught these skills in unique ways. The philosophy and politics embedded in the class extended past class time to infuse community engagement into student's personality.

To model and infuse community engagement, AOMAP served as a creative fundraiser and collaborator for other survival programs. The *TBP* used pictures from the AOMAP at least 8 different times in the advertisements for the Educational Opportunities Corporation, the independent, not-for-profit that raised money for the OCS. The photos showed students jumping into the air and executing kicks. The impressiveness of such techniques attracted donors to the caliber and diversity of instruction provided by the school.[107] On May 12, 1975, the OCS showcased the same "limber and skilled youth" at a fundraising carnival. The performance was soundly "applauded by onlookers."[108] A month later, the students skillfully executed their tae kwon do aerobatics for a community forum. At the same event, the Free Shoe Program gave away 200 new pairs of "stylish shoes" for adults and children.[109] A year later at the OCS's First Annual Winter Festival in 1976, the AOMAP demonstrated a "thrilling" series of exercises. Students wielded wooden bō staffs to showcase their weapons skills, entertaining the community

[105] "Interview with Steve McCutchen, Director of the Community Learning Center Martial Arts Program," *The Black Panther*, August 18, 1975, 23.
[106] "Interview with Steve McCutchen, Director of the Community Learning Center Martial Arts Program," *The Black Panther*, August 18, 1975, 23.
[107] Issues that include these advertisements include March 22, June 30, and June 2, 1975; June 5, October 13, and December 25, 1976. The April 16th, 1977 issue includes a child doing a jumping flip kick in the photo.
[108] "Youth Institute Carnival Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, May 12, 1975, 4.
[109] "Karate Team, Free Shoe Program at Community Forum," *The Black Panther*, April 19, 1975, 4.

while the Panthers distributed free legal aid, groceries, toys, and Christmas trees. They performed in conjunction with the drill team, the U.S. China Friendship Association Dancers, and a group of students learning Azanian [South African] dances under the OCS's Artist-in-Residence.[110] Outside performances, the Forum discussed the lack of access to nutritious foods, sold dinners, and hosted a bake sale for the Seniors Against A Fearful Environment (S.A.F.E) program. [111] To support S.A.F.E further, students such as Fred Morehead used their training to safely escort seniors home. Making students work alongside other programs stressed socialist values that athletes work with others for the collective good.[112]

The martial arts program and all of the OCLC programs expected participants to contribute to making a better community as a form of Black Power organizing. Using performance in this manner served youth and community vis á vis the body and soul. It built community "intercommunally" through movement. In effect,

> The reason for good health is to be able to utilize your body to its fullest capacity to make positive contributions; life develops to contribute to others' experiences. Martial arts may develop the defense/attack reflex, but at the same time, it must also develop healthy mental attitudes towards life and living. Training develops all the senses and enables the individual to take in more of the realities of his/her experiences.[113]

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[110] "First Annual Winter Festival Celebrates Community Survival," *The Black Panther*, December 25, 1976, cover page and 14-15. The U.S. China Friendship Association dancers had movements that were derived from China. Thoko Mondalase-Hall directed the choreography of the youth doing Azanian dances. Their residence was by sponsored by the California Arts Council's Arts-in school Program.

[111] "First Annual Winter Festival Celebrates Community Survival," *The Black Panther*, December 25, 1976, cover page and 14-15. The AOMAP also performed at other fundraisers over the years like an August 1977 radiothon. See *The Black Panther*, August 27, 1977.

[112] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," The Black Panther, March 6, 1976, 23. Hoch states in the article, "Even China's most internationally renowned athletes are expected to work alongside other workers and peasants in the factories and communes."

[113] "The Total Experience," *The Black Panther*, May 26, 1975, 23.

Indeed, Black martial arts instructors beyond McCutchen looked to the combat sports as a tool for student and community development. In an August 1975 interview with *TBP*, Black martial arts instructors from Byong Yu Studios in Berkeley described tae kwon do as an "avenue to attaining a social goal."[114] The dojang, they argued, was a "microcosm of society…You have individuals with different levels of education and cultural backgrounds. Yet in the dojang, through TKD, there is…the feeling of helping each other and sharing."[115] The Byong Yu Black instructors stressed how important it was to discuss report cards and absences from school with their students. "As Blacks become more involved in the martial arts, they're more capable of tackling the problems outside the studio," instructor Greg McKinley believed. These sentiments contextualize why teachers like McCutchen became independent instructors so early. The best way to support community youth perhaps was to offer free, community-based instruction and to not wait for certain forms of qualification.[116] When he finally earned his black belt, the newspaper congratulated McCutchen on having already brought the spirit of martial arts to the Center. The staff wished him well "in his future endeavors in combining the fields of martial arts and community growth."[117]

Because of the AOMAP's community spirit, *The Black Panther* staff repeatedly used photos of the program's students to depict the OCS in "A Program for Survival." Reprinted throughout the year, "A Program for Survival" was the list of the Party's survival programs advertised at the back of the newspaper on page 27, right behind the Martial Arts and Sports page. The paper used photos from the programs to make the offerings attractive. When the staff

[114] "Special Interview At South Berkeley Byong Yu Studio: Tae Kwon Do: 'Avenue to Attaining a Social Goal,'" *The Black Panther*, August 4, 1975, 23. These instructors included Anthony Ricketts, Greg McKinley, and Peter Woods.
[115] "Special Interview At South Berkeley Byong Yu Studio: Tae Kwon Do: 'Avenue to Attaining a Social Goal,'" *The Black Panther*, August 4, 1975, 23. "Dojang" is the Korean equivalent of a Japanese "dojo."
[116] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Director Awarded," *The Black Panther*, October 18, 1975.
[117] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Director Awarded," *The Black Panther*, October 18, 1975

used pictures of the AOMAP to represent the OCS, it illustrated that teaching children how to fly and how to punch was integral to the schools' program for survival.[118] This was already an intriguing intervention. But by June 4, 1977, the "Free Martial Arts Program" wriggled out on its own and was pictured as its own community survival program.[119]

As a survival program, the AOMAP revolved around creating spaces of belonging as well as places to learn appreciation and experience happiness. Inspired by community love, McCutchen and his Bay Area world of Black instructors used movement arts to evoke a sentiment voiced by Huey Newton: "I met someone the other day and they were a part of me I did not appreciate."[120] The pedagogy of Black beauty, love, and intra-community appreciation equaled Black pride and Black Power. As Byong Yu Instructor McKinley stressed, "Among friends there should be love and harmony. Students should be able to feel joy of being alive and to partake in what life has to offer."[121] Fellow instructor Peter Woods added, "Blacks have been able…to become lovers of life who have found real beauty in martial arts."

Interviews with the Cascos Kempo Kungfu Karate Club also revealed a network of Black instructors who used martial arts to teach survival through self-love.[122] When asked, "What do you feel martial arts contributes to Black people," Sensei Bill Owens responded:

> Basically, I would tend to lean towards self-confidence that is developed, that martial arts develops in Black people. I watch other martial arts schools or other private schools and they get very heavy into the physical, the self-defense aspect. This is very important

[118] This happens in multiple issues of paper. For examples, see *The Black Panther* July 21, 1975, November 15, 1975, and February 2, 1978.
[119] "A Program for Survival," *The Black Panther*, June 4, 1977, 27.
[120] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*.
[121] "Special Interview At South Berkeley Byong Yu Studio: Tae Kwon Do: 'Avenue to Attaining a Social Goal,'" August 4th, 1975, 23.
[122] They are called the "only Black martial arts club in northern California" in the newspaper. It is unclear if they mean the only Black owned club. And it is unclear what parts of the state comprise northern California. For example, it is not clear if Oakland counts. The Black instructors include Bill Owens, Lionel Seals, Ron Champion, and Ron Brown. See "Black Martial Arts Club Members Interviewed: 'We Use Self-Defense in a Broader Meaning,'" *The Black Panther*, September 15, 1975, 23.

> to them. This is what people pay for, this is what they come for and this is what they get. That's fine. And this is what we intend to teach as well. But since we are Black and since the students coming here are young and they are children, we also try to make them realize or try to make them use self-defense in a broader meaning, use martial arts in a way that they can find themselves or just appreciate themselves as they are, which is Black. Recognition of self-appreciation would be one way of saying the whole thing.[123]

Appearing in the sports section of the newspaper, this provocation helps us understand that, for the Panthers, community survival through martial arts was bigger than physical self-defense as well. Owen's fellow instructor Ron Champions added, "Unity within the Blacks, within this club [is key] there is a lot of self-dignity you gain from this unity, a lot of respect you gain for yourself. And, then you show your brother, your sister and your immediate family more respect as well."[124] As suggested, the "broader" usage of martial arts was for Black respect and love. Martial arts brought together Black Power commitments to self-defense as well as commitments to Black self- appreciation. But because movies pulled in many of their students by 1975, Black instructors had to fold lessons about respect into enticing training regiments. They showed them how to fight earlier, to be like the David Carradine's character in the television series *Kung Fu*.[125] But in getting them to stay, Cascos' Lionel Seals noted, "You show respect for each other and the same respect I show for Sifo, here, I show for a six-year-old brother in the school.

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[123] "Black Martial Arts Club Members Interviewed: 'We Use Self-Defense in a Broader Meaning,'" *The Black Panther*, September 15, 1975, 23.

[124] "Black Martial Arts Club Members Interviewed: 'We Use Self-Defense in a Broader Meaning,'" The Black Panther, September 15, 1975, 23.

[125] Owens noted that movies provided motivation for student participation. But they showcased an environment of training that could not be replicated by instructors, especially not in a way that students would be interested in: "Say with the early instructors they try to show in the movies or on the TV series *Kung Fu*. Some of the things he had to do in martial arts to develop his training, now you can't ask people to go through that, especially Western people and Black people. We can't ask our students to spend the first six months of their training studying the horse position. They've seen the Bruce Lee movies, they see it on TV; they see fighting. More than likely this is what they came for. If we can keep them, we can teach them that this is not all there is to martial arts. But, in order to keep them, we have to show them some fighting, some techniques or they will not stay. They will not work on a horse or on a straight punch for say six or eight months until it is completely perfected." "Black Martial Arts Club Members Interviewed: 'We Use Self-Defense in a Broader Meaning,'" The Black Panther, September 15, 1975, 23.

Basically, I start off in a humble style, which teaches us to be humble with our loved ones and our enemies until somebody tried to inflict bodily harm to us."[126]

Institutionalizing self-appreciation and community appreciation for student was hard work. To honor student's determination, growth, and athletic abilities, the AOMAP celebrated achievements through award and promotions ceremonies. In November 1975, the AOMAP held its first Awards Presentation Dinner and Dance and granted over 60 awards to "outstanding students who had contributed their time towards building and improving themselves as well as the program."[127] The affair alone drew at least 300 supporters "who punctuat[ed] the event with warm applause."[128]

As the years rolled on, young women and men progressed through the ranks of the system by passing hours of "strenuous testing."[129] One prominent highlight came in November 1976, when Fred Morehead became the program's first student to receive a black belt. As a fighter, Morehead had already started participating in amateur and professional matches against "older and more (supposedly) experienced" black belts from other schools.[130] McCutchen, who proudly helped raise Morehead like a son,[131] stated at the ceremony that, "Fred is not the exception in this program, but one outstanding example of one individual's quest for learning and achievement."[132] Morehead and other students' progress indicated how life could be survived through self-love and sport.

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[126] "Black Martial Arts Club Members Interviewed: 'We Use Self-Defense in a Broader Meaning,'" *The Black Panther*, September 15, 1975, 23.
[127] "All Open Martial Arts Program Holds Awards Dinner and Dance," The Black Panther, November 22, 1975, 4.
[128] "All Open Martial Arts Program Holds Awards Dinner and Dance," The Black Panther, November 22, 1975, 4.
[129] "O.C.L.C. Martial Arts Promotions," *The Black Panther*, August 28, 1976, 23.
[130] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Student Wins Black Belt The Black Panther," The Black Panther, November 27, 1976, 23.
[131] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[132] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Student Wins Black Belt The Black Panther," The Black Panther, November 27, 1976, 23. For more on awards and promotions, see issues such as June 9, 1975; September 1, 1975; February 28, 1976; and August 28, 1976.

IV. Panther-Tiger Style vs the Competition: Tournaments, Public Participation, and the Accessible Pleasure of Black Power Sports

The public participated in the AOMAP through more than just ceremonies. Beyond demonstrations that signaled commitment to Third World and class struggle, the AOMAP engaged in various activities that made sports entertainment accessible throughout East Oakland. As written above, from Summer 1975 on, martial arts demos populated the OCLC's calendar. At that point, the program had 217 students enrolled. Audiences, sometimes of 250 people, witnessed how their "non-stop training program built endurance and physical control."[133] At the First Annual Martial Arts Festival curated by the Son of Man Temple Community Forum, not only did the students perform, but the 5th ranked Lightweight Karate contender, Howard Jackson, spoke.[134] In February 1976, the AOMAP hosted its own winter festival. Students executed katas they chose themselves and shadow boxed invisible opponents to the sounds of the O'Jay's "Unity". They showcased advanced showmanship by warding off multiple attackers. Finally, they curated a skit called "Karate This," where the students mocked an overly confident disciple who was beaten by a non-martial artist. According to *TBP*, the skit conveyed that "knowledge of martial arts techniques [did] not make a person "'superman'" and that "arrogance has no place in martial arts."[135] Finally, they performed a skit called "In Slow Motion," where students

[133] "Sunday Forum Thrilled at Martial Arts Demonstration," *The Black Panther*, June 9, 1975. This date was the "All Open Martial Arts First Program Exercise Demonstration at the Community Learning Center." Pictures from the even include a photo of a student executing a flying side kick over a group of students.
[134] "Community Forum Holds First Annual Martial Arts Festival," *The Black Panther*, September 1, 1975, 4. According to the newspaper, Howard Jackson was also the 1973-1974 Professional Karate Champion. According to Vijay Prashad, Howard, from Detroit, "took the world of kung fu by storm, winning the Battle for Atlanta and becoming the first African American to be ranked number one in the sport's history." See Vijay Prashad, "Kung Fusion: Organize the 'Hood Under I-Ching Banners," *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 133.
[135] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23.

> re-enacted conflict situations, and when the actual fight started, everyone moved in slow motion. It created a visual effect that left a vivid image with the observers as students showed excellent control and timing in the fluidity of their movements, punching, kicking, gouging, falling, blocking, giving the audience the effect of watching a slow-motion picture of martial arts combat.[136]

These demonstrations showed such "community spirit and enthusiasm" and creativity that they received ovations as well as donations. After such vivid demonstrations, the audience participated in the promotion of students advancing in rank. Of the 12 students promoted, four were young women, all of whom were promoted beyond to belts at least two beyond beginner. [137] The program ended with students fighting on the ground, modelling how to defend oneself with "street realism."[138]

Because of the "inspirational," "entertaining," and convincing nature of these demonstations, more people joined the program. AOMAP's community inclusivity and viewership were part of a larger schedule of community sporting events. Other such events included community basketball games. Even at such games, the AOMAP performed. At a match between the OCLC Panthers and the KSOL Basketbloods, AOMAP student Randy Lee shattered a cinder block with his bare hands for half-time entertainment.[139]

As participatory sporting affairs, AOMAP collaborative events provided accessible, community spaces to watch sports for a reasonable price. This, I argue, nurtured an environment

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[136] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23.
[137] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23. The article specifies: "The students promoted included "Billy Schelton (yellow); Daniel Simms (yellow), Eugene Burks, (yellow), Sandra Howard, purple, Giselle Pheanious, purple, Eric Lindsey, blue; Bruce Presley, blue; Troy Ferguson, blue; Diane Beamon, blue; Henrietta Watson, green; Alonzo Jackson, green; and Fred Morehead, red. The belt color rankings of the program, in order are: yellow, purple, green, red and black."
[138] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23.
[139] "O.C.L.C Basketball Game Scores Points," *The Black Panther*, May 15, 1976, 23.

of "publicly engaged Black Power sports." The Party vehemently supported critiques that big money, sports entertainment used the public without creating inclusive spaces. On May 14, 1977 the paper reprinted "Sports in America: More Bread N Circuses," by Paul Hoch, who wrote the article lauding Chinese sports. He also wrote the book, *Rip Off the Big Game: The Exploitation of Sports by the Power Elite*. In the article, he reasoned,

> the implication is that no matter how bad unemployment, slums, racism, and oppression generally may get, we can all escape to the coliseums where we will get the 'real thing.' Spectator sports as the ultimate opium, [go] and enjoy the gladiators. And, as in the days of the Roman Empire, the gladiators are drawn from those classes which are most oppressed (or as Harry Edwards would call them, "Black Gladiators for White America.").[140]

Hoch believe that typical sports entertainment in the U.S. was constricted by capitalism and plagued by a commercialized use of Black bodies that lacked a community ethos. Trying to undermine the class struggle inherent in the American sports industrial complex, the AOMAP put on cost effective and hence "accessible," spectator friendly tournaments. As Hoch mentioned in his article on China, "[Athletes] are not allowed to think of themselves as a special elite above the people. For their own part, the mass of the people are not placed (as they are [in the U.S.]) in the role of passive spectators. Sports are for everyone. For the people."[141]

With the ethos "'technique comes first,'"[142] the OCLC hosted its competition, the Martial Arts Friendship Tournament/Tournament of Friends (MAFT), in 1976, 1977, and 1978. It brought competitors from other Black-operated schools and from different races to the OCLC. Each spread on the tournament exhibited photographs that transported readers right into the

[140] Paul Hoch, "Sports in America: More Bread N Circuses," *The Black Panther*, May 21, 1977, 23.
[141] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 26.
[142] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," *The Black Panther*, March 6, 1976, 26.

throes of action. [143] As sporting events, the first U.S.-based, martial arts tournaments were established in the 1950s. Competitors honed their skills in categories for weapons, kata, and fighting, all to earn coveted trophies. They sprung up on the West Coast as well as in cities like Atlanta and Washington D.C. California had some of the largest martial arts communities. But the MAFT established itself against what it perceived as the "opportunistic manner in which the average commercial martial arts tournament" conducted itself.[144] McCutchen opposed tournaments where "referees…[got] into brawls with participants and black belt level instructors…attacked students, all showing complete disregard for the principles of respect and honor underlying martial arts."[145]

Far from an attitude held just by McCutchen, the AOMAP was part of a series of Black martial arts programs that critiqued tournament culture circuit in California and derided its "favoritism and dog-eat-go attitudes."[146] In Southern California, the Black Karate Federation (BKF) made the same claims starting in the late 1960s. As discussed in detail in the Introduction, a group of Black men including veterans like Steve Muhammad founded the BKF in 1967. The BKF wore Pan-African colors in their school patch. Because they were also influenced by the "consciousness raising" of the Black Power Era like other Black martial artists, they were perceived to be a Black Power group akin to the Panthers.[147] State surveillance occurred despite the BKF's lack of formal association with any leftist or any anti-statist Black Power groups. According to Muhammad, once when they practiced in Van Ness Park in South Central Los

[143] See "'Tournament of Friends': OCLC Martial Arts Festival stresses 'Friendship First, Competition Second,'" *The Black Panther*, January 31, 1976, 23; "O.C.L.C's 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23; and "Friendship First: 3rd Annual O.C.L.C Martial Arts Tournament Held," *The Black Panther*, January 28, 1978, 23.
[144] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," The Black Panther, February 28, 1976, 23.
[145] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23.
[146] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23.
[147] See the Introduction and Chapter 2 for more on "consciousness raising."

Angeles, police helicopters circled overhead of the black bodies of dozens of their students. But the surveillance was ironic because the group maintained a positive outlook on community uplift through law enforcement service. This meant that despite no association to the Panthers, other radical groups, or any Black political organizations for that matter, the BKF's belief in the tenants of Black Power and usage of unarmed self-defense in L.A. was enough to warrant profiling.[148] Between the BKF and other schools, it was clear the AOMAP belonged to a geographically expansive community of Black combat athletes influenced by and surveilled because of Black Power. But their disillusionment opened space for Black-run martial arts sports competitions.

When the first MAFT came alive on January 24, 1976, the AOMAP collaborated with its network to create community sports programming. The competition foregrounded "'friendship first, competition second.'" This purposefully countered the "win at all costs or be a loser" mentality of football coaches and military generals mentioned above. Byong Yu Studio, Cascos Kempo Club, the Golden Dragon Fighting Society, and the Korean Tae Kwon Do Institute all joined to form a "very exciting, friendly and enjoyable" tournament. *The Black Panther* emphasized MAFT's cooperative nature and age diversity. Judges scored kata, self-defense exhibitions, point sparring, and freestyle sparing, i.e. *kumite,* for girls and boys as young as 5 all the way up to adult women and men.[149] By breaking from "strict and rigid-and often times racistly applies rules" that undermined "health, friendship, and safety," officials judged more fairly.[150]

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[148] A nephew of one of the Oakland Panthers did train with the BKF, however. It is important to note that at least one BKF member worked with the police during his life, which would have been at odds with the Panther's interpretations of Black Power. But the two schools did encounter each other collegially it seems at tournaments, including the 1977 Long Beach International Karate Championships. For more on how the BKF was surveilled, see Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Ken*po.

[149] "Kumite" is the Japanese term.

[150] "'Tournament of Friends': OCLC Martial Arts Festival stresses 'Friendship First, Competition Second,'" *The Black Panther*, January 31, 1976, 23.

The Black Panther also emphasized MAFT's gender inclusivity. According to reporters, women played "a prominent role" in sparring and "throughout the whole tournament."[151] McCutchen thought this was due to "women's growing concern for their own well-being and development of their natural, creative abilities," a "growing concern" certainly influenced by the first decade of title IX and increased sporting opportunities. [152] In their competition categories, women used their leg power to execute kicks. During the tournament's break, 8 members of the Mighty Panther Drill Team joined in by performing powerful "soul-stepping." Though women had participated in tournaments since the 1960s, the Friendship Tournament belonged to a history of Black run tournaments that took women's participation seriously. For instance, New York's Fred Hamilton was the first tournament promoter of any race to "fully participate in all categories of martial arts competition," beating White and Asian hosts to the punch.[153]

Fair judging and inclusivity opened doors for an enjoyable, shared sporting space across gender, age, and class differences. It also opened the door for an expansive connection to the Panther's larger health agenda. The George Jackson/People's Free Health Clinic provided first aid, emergency support, free Sickle Cell testing, and "eye, ear, nose and throat checkups."[154] The OCLC kitchen even sold "hearty" fried chicken dinners to nourish tournament goers at low prices, using proceeds to support the Center.[155]

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[151] "'Tournament of Friends': OCLC Martial Arts Festival stresses 'Friendship First, Competition Second,'" *The Black Panther*, January 31, 1976, 23.
[152] "'Tournament of Friends': OCLC Martial Arts Festival stresses 'Friendship First, Competition Second,'" *The Black Panther*, January 31, 1976, 23.
[153] "Fred Hamilton: Shotokan Karate-Jitsu," Who's Who, Usadojo.com, accessed April 24, 2020, https://www.usadojo.com/fred-hamilton/.
[154] See "'Tournament of Friends': OCLC Martial Arts Festival stresses 'Friendship First, Competition Second,'" The *Black Panther*, January 31, 1976, 23 and "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.
[155] "'Tournament of Friends': OCLC Martial Arts Festival stresses 'Friendship First, Competition Second,'" The *Black Panther*, January 31, 1976, 23. The articled provided this additional information about the tournament's wrap-up: "Following the competition, students from the OCLC MAP, along with those taught by Brother Julius Baker, performed school demonstrations, in which each group performed movements that exemplified the guiding concepts of each particular school. The finale of the Tournament came when the winners of each competition bracket were awarded certificates from the OCLC AOMAP."

Following the success of the first year, the second annual tournament sprang into action on January 23, 1977 with a modest suggestion entrance donation of 50 cents.[156] It brought in more sponsorship, this time from the Bay Area Athletic Project and the Oakland Karate Club. In line with the previous year, the tournament provided health testing and low-cost refreshments in the O.C.L.C café.[157] It expanded to an outstanding 19 divisions, which included events for "soft and hard style kata," wood breaking, and "individual and team free style matches."[158] Held at the center's "spacious auditorium" at 6118 East 14th street, the community event hosted roughly 400 spectators, prompting the Panthers to boastfully call it the "Biggest Community Tournament in Northern California." Athletes travelled from as far as Sacramento, Stockton, and Santa Cruz just to compete.[159] As with its predecessor, paper coverage emphasized its focus on cooperation, health, and gender inclusion. The Alameda School of Karate, the Vargas Kempo Kickboxing School, Casco Kempo-Kungfu Club, and Byong Yu Studios all helped tear "the roof off."[160] Older students and stellar fighters such as Fred Morehead and August O'Neal joined the referee staff. According to the *TBP*, despite the high level of competition during the day's "hotly contested events," excellence in sportsmanship and technique created Black power comradery and required little use of the clinic's emergency services.

The visual culture that remains from MAFT tournaments successfully memorializes the technique, skill, and camaraderie between Black girls and boys. Drawing the reader's eye, photographers captured young artists frozen in action or soaring in the air.[161] The photo spread for the 2nd tournament included photos like one captioned, "Young woman displays her form

[156] Advertisement, *The Black Panther*, January 8, 1977, 23.
[157] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," The Black Panther, January 29, 1977, 23.
[158] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.
[159] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.
[160] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.
[161] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.

during a martial arts Kata exercise." [162] In it, the athlete poses with poise and spear-hands the throat of an invisible opponent. Within another photograph, a competitor launches off the ground to deliver a kick against her opponent. Donning natural hair atop sleek, black uniforms, they powerfully twist their hips and legs into strikes, underscoring a much different type of power than the sexual power over attributed to young Black women's lower bodies. Off the mat, the Mighty Panthers Drill Team mirrored the female martial artists with a striking performance of their own for a second year. Their stepping was one of several performances that included the OCS school band, who played "Fame" at intermission while Black Magic, an independent men's troupe, danced in front of them.[163]

The heart of the community event celebrated Black sporting excellence and spotlighted students who "demonstrated outstanding skills."[164] Besides trophies, the tournament committee conducted a poll and bestowed merit awards upon deserving athletes who would "otherwise [have gone] without recognition for their studious efforts in their respective areas of martial arts."[165] This decentered the need to win 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place. For the trophies given to actual division winners, first-place winners secured stunning plaques while team fighting secured winners' trophies topped with male and female karate figurines. Second, third, and fourth place winners received ribbons win.

Overall, the prioritization of friendship and health related to the Panthers' idolization of socialist, non-Western countries and how they supposedly played sports. Hosting their own tournament let the Panthers get away from the nasty environments and expensiveness of other tournaments. Nevertheless, despite the program's aversion to these competitions, the AOMAP

[162] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.
[163] It was the San Antonio Village Men's Troupe. See "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," *The Black Panther*, January 29, 1977, 23.
[164] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," The Black Panther, January 29, 1977, 23.
[165] "O.C.L.C.'s 2nd Annual Martial Arts Friendship Tournament Huge Success," The Black Panther, January 29, 1977, 23.

participated in tournaments beyond the community fostering initiatives of the MAFT. Students entered in roughly 20 martial arts tournaments between August 1975 and June 1978. A major victory occurred at their first appearance at the Long Beach International Karate Championship (LBIKC). McCutchen, Morehead, Diane Beamon, and program administrator Beverly Brown, traveled to Southern California to compete at the tournament, which was perhaps the most prestigious in the country. The LBIKC distinguished itself as an elite tournament but its reputation has often been forged as the venue where, 11 years earlier, Bruce Lee performed his famous 2 finger push-up. Years later, 16-year-old Beamon shocked the crowd by winning all her daytime matches.[166] In the evening, she battled for first place on center stage against the top-ranked female fighter in the country.[167] Though she won 2nd place, her win helped people take note of the "no names" from the OCLC.[168]

The AOMAP's victories generated enthusiasm over Black power sports and produced numerous tournament champions in California and Nevada. At the Northern California Karate Referees Association Karate Championships on Feb 8, 1976 at San Francisco's Riordan High School, 13-year-old Giselle Pheanious placed 2nd in the Junior Girl's Fighting and Fred Morehead placed 2nd in the Junior Boy's Heavyweight Division.[169] That spring students like Bill Owens also competed at tournaments at San Jose City College and San Francisco City College.[170] Other notable tournaments included the California State Karate Championships at Oakland Auditorium. Although they did not win any trophies against the "the top amateur karate

[166] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 175.
[167] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 175.
[168] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 175.
[169] "O.C.L.C Youth Win Martial Arts Awards," *The Black Panther*, February 14, 1976, 23. The tournament was held on March 6th.
[170] "O.C.L.C. Martial Arts Student Wins Honors," *The Black Panther*, March 20, 1976, 23. The San Jose City College Tournament was hosted by the Karate Ways Club and the Open Tai Twon Do tournament was held at San Francisco City College.

competitors in the state," students ate bonded and ate free lunches from the Free Food Program. Their crumbs tumbled down onto new uniforms and emblems specially prepared to honor the BPP's 10th Anniversary."[171]

Throughout 1977, the program heavily critiqued and suffered from the bias and poor sportsmanship it decried. Fred Morehead and Jerome Mack placed 2nd and 3rd place respectively in the Middleweight black belt division (156-172lbs) at the San Francisco County Karate Championships. *TBP* reported that the judges "gave" the first place winner victories over both Morehead and Mack for techniques that were "highly disputed among competitors, fans and other referees alike."[172] Blaming a combination of "sports and politics and dubious rules," *TBP* claimed that this was part of a larger problem that included "'scoring favorites' and a host of other narrow views." Some referees only awarded points for hand strikes. Others favored certain "easily recognized" kicks to head or the body.

At the Lake Tahoe Tournament in Nevada, the AOMAP experienced overt racism, but still won 9 trophies in addition to the Outstanding Participation Trophy, awarded to the best school present. In one instance at the tournament, a white instructor declared, "I don't want any niggers judging my girls," in response to AOMAP's Danny Simms position as a referee.[173] When AOMAP returned to the LBIKC championships on August 6th and 7th, they faced regional bias against Northern California while competing alongside 1500-4000 other athletes.[174] Despite the hardship of finding equitable judging, the AOMAP demonstrated the capacity of community-

[171] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts at Calif. Championships," *The Black Panther*, November 6, 1976, 23.
[172] "More Honors For O.C.L.C Martial Arts Students," *The Black Panther*, March 12, 1977, 23. The tournament was held on March 12th at Riordan High School. The judges were from the Northern California Karate Referees Association.
[173] "O.C.LC. Karate Club Wins 9 Trophies at Lake Tahoe Tournament," *The Black Panther*, July 2, 1977, 23.
[174] "O.C.L.C. Martial Arts Team Charges 'Foul Play' at Karate Championships," *The Black Panther*, August 20, 1977, 23. The AOMAP competed in divisions that included the 11 and 12-year-old divisions as well as women's and men's black belt divisions. They also interacted with the Steve Sanders, i.e. Steve Muhammad, and the Black Karate Federation. This last piece of information was revealed by Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.

engaged, Black Power sports. They did so in front of large audiences at tournaments like the LBIKC, which sported approximately 3,000 to 6,000 spectators.[175]

By their Sept 24th victory at the Golden State Karate Championships, the club overcame many of these difficulties and earned the nickname "the mean machine."[176] Morehead earned one of his many Black Belt Grand Championships and Lisa Williams placed in 3rd in her fight divisions while nursing a hand injury. As at many tournaments, more than one young Panther woman took home a top trophy. Taray Green won 2nd place in her junior girls' fighting division. Both young women repeatedly garnered accolades for the program. In terms of collecting trophies, Morehead stood at the fore. By June 1978, not only had the program earned dozens of trophies, but Morehead himself had achieved the rank of #10 fighter in his region, the largest in the country.[177] He and other competitive fighters, such as Danny Simms, joined McCutchen and assistant instructor Norman White in professional and amateur fights throughout California.[178] As time progressed, the AOMAP style transformed from the basics and street self-defense into a fearsome tournament style that vied for glory against formidable fighters. No matter the stage, McCutchen taught a smart tournament strategy replete with spinning side and heel kicks, snapping, lead leg attacks, and powerful rear leg, roundhouse kicks. This flair was Black Panther sports.

[175] "O.C.L.C. Martial Arts Team Charges 'Foul Play' at Karate Championships," *The Black Panther*, August 20, 1977, 23.
[176] "O.C.L.C Marital Arts Team Storms Back," *The Black Panther*, September 24, 1977, 23
[177] "'Mean Machine' Captures 13 Trophies: O.C.L.C Wins Tahoe Karate Championship," *The Black Panther*, June 3rd, 1978, 16. The region is named as the Northwestern Region.
[178] For examples of these fights, see "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Instructor Scores Decisive Victory in Pro Bout," *The Black Panther*, May 15, 1976, 26 and "O.C.L.C Takes Part in Karate Matches," *The Black Panther*, July 31, 1976, 23.

V. Female Panthers, Fighting, and Feminism: New Approaches to Sport and Women's Self-Defense in the Black Panther Party

Overall, young women's participation in the AOMAP transforms what we understand about the Party, its gender politics, and its mid to late 1970s culture. The tenor of Black feminist thought influenced Black liberation organizing, and women changed their roles throughout the Black Power Movement. As stated earlier, Panther men and women fulfilled similar roles throughout the 1970s, including normally feminized roles of taking care of children and working the breakfast programs. Diffusing gender expectations extended to participation in the martial arts program. Young women and girls factored significantly in both the OCS and OCLC programs. At times, the OCS's "student population was roughly 55 percent female and 45 percent male," meaning that girls' presence in McCutchen's classes would have been significant.[179] During McCutchen's five years with AOMAP, approximately 500 young women trained with the program. This means that they made up at least 1/4 of his students. McCutchen called the girls "more competitive" than the boys, de-emphasizing the notion that girls came more for self-defense than for athletics.[180] In addition to the female athletes mentioned above, others who constituted a passionate portion of the OCLC's athletes included Sandra Howard, Tamar Brown, and Danette Wallace. Lisa Walker and Carol Wallace widened a pool of Black female athletes too. They fought for and won first place fighting trophies in senior and light weight divisions respectively at the 1977 Pacific Coast Karate Championships.[181] Taray Green and Lisa Williams added several trophies to AOMAP win column as well, including their

[179] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education," 172.
[180] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[181] "O.C.L.C Karate Team Wins," *The Black Panther*, November 5, 1977, 23.

respective 2nd place and 3rd place fighting trophies at the Golden State Karate Championships in September 1977.[182]

Given the collision between leftist politics, Women's Liberation, and the shifting dynamics of women in sports, the inclusion of female athletes in the martial arts program is unsurprising. The AOMAP's commitment to gender equity was reflected in the *TBP*'s articles. It voraciously covered developments for Black women and girls in sports like basketball and boxing. These included feats of Black women and the discrimination and lack of opportunities that young athletes faced. *TBP* reporters followed the career of Delta State University's Luisa "Lucy" Harris. Harris was considered a woman's pioneer in basketball. Before the NCAA was established, she won 3 AIAW National Championships and the first ever silver medal for Women's Olympic Basketball in 1976. The NBA also drafted her, making history for the league's first drafted woman. *TBP* avidly monitored her 51-game win streak that led to her 1976 player of the year award.[183] Other notable articles covered Rene Powell's 1976 run against racism on the Ladies Professional Golf Association tour.[184] There was also Gloria Garcia, a 12 year-old Chicanx boxing champion in Wyoming who, after winning her title, was barred from fighting boys by the Amateur Athletic Union.[185] The paper commented on women's potential to break barriers, too. It reprinted quotes from figures such as the Atlanta Brave's Henry Aaron. In 1977, he said, given their talent in other sports, there was no logical reason as to why women would not eventually play in Major League Baseball.[186] All of these topics complemented the

[182] "O.C.L.C Marital Arts Team Storms Back," *The Black Panther*, September 24, 1977, 23.
[183] See "Lucy Harris Leads Awesome Delta State Team to-51-Game Streak: Black Woman Touted as Greatest Female Basketball Player Ever." *The Black Panther*, March 13, 1976, 23 and "Lucy Harris Named 'Woman Player of the Year' In College Basketball," The Black Panther, May 1, 1976, 23.
[184] "Rene Powell Defeats Pro Golfing Racism: Only Black Woman on L.P.G.A.," *The Black Panther*, October 23, 1976, 23.
[185] "Female Boxer Barred," *The Black Panther*, May 28, 1977, 23.
[186] "Women in Baseball," *The Black Panther*, July 16, 1977, 23.

coverage of the Mighty Panthers Drill Team's stand-alone and collaborative events with the AOMAP.[187]

The drive to train young women could also been seen in McCutchen's community engaged column, where he often invited a wider audience to think of martial arts as a gender inclusive space. Rather than address his subjects in his columns as "he" or "men," he often referred to martial artists using "he or she." This choice did more than undermined the idea that the male pronoun represents gender neutrality. It upended any assumptions that the AOMAP's classes and knowledge were only envisioned for young men.[188]

A perceived socialist approach to gender influenced the AOMAP and *TBP*'s approach to gender and martial arts education. In the article where Micki and Jack Scott were interviewed about Cuba, the paper asked Micki Scott to expound upon her point that: "the women's movement has had a very important impact on sports, both good and bad." She responded,

> When I go running, I see more and more women out there asserting their right to participate. I'm not talking about women track stars, but about lots of women who have overcome or are working to overcome the embarrassment they've been made to feel about actively engaging in sport or exercise. I think this is a really healthy thing for both women and men. It's healthy for women because they're gaining strength and self-confidence by doing something that feels good. It's healthy for men because it forces them to redefine their own role in sports. Hopefully, sports will be more enjoyable and less and less a proving thing for men, because of women's involvement. The other side of the coin is that a great

[187] For independent performances, see articles such as "'Mighty Panthers' Perform At Community Forum," The Black Panther, August 14, 1976, 6.
[188] For another example of gender inclusive language, see "Hitting," *The Black Panther*, May 29, 1976, 23.

> deal of women's involvement in sports has been coopted. Little girls are now going to be gobbled up into the regimentation of Little League just like little boys. Women are getting athletic scholarships to college but there are going to be the same problems of exploitation and bribery now with women as there have been with men.[189]

Scott feared the financial drive behind U.S. sports could affect young women as much as men. However, she felt assured by the fact that young girls and women enjoyed the confidence and health gained through physical activity. This is the model she, her husband, and Paul Hoch claimed to see in socialist and communist nations. Scott had already mentioned in the article how girls felt less stigmatized and otherized as "tomboys" for participating in Cuba. In his China article, Hoch stressed how, "[unlike the West] Chinese girls develop their physical strength through athletics, and in general develop an active, assertive orientation towards both sports and life. No one asks them to stand on the sidelines and cheer their men on to victory. Whether in sports or in work or in politics, they are fully involved."[190]While this socialist rhetoric included women in both government and physical culture, it served a nationalist discourse on citizenship and healthy bodies. Thus, Panther ideals about sports were informed by an anti-western nationalism that was not inherently more radical than U.S. nationalism. Regardless, the Panthers' interpretation of socialism and communism informed radical ideas about genders and bodies. During the 1970s, *TBP* espoused opinions that debunked gendered health attitudes, including dismissing cellulite as a fabrication targeted against women.[191]

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[189] "An interview with Jack and Micki Scott, Bill Walton: Trio Attempts to Humanize Sports in America," The Black Panther, July 7, 1975, 23.
[190] Hoch, "'Friendship Before Competition': China's Sports for the People," The Black Panther, March 6, 1976, 23.
[191] "N.Y. medical society discredits 'cellulite,'" *The Black Panther*, December 27, 1975, 8. The TBP wrote on the subject: "NY country Medical society last week warned women that cellulite, blamed for unsightly "lumps of fat" in women in books on physical fitness doesn't exist and that some proposed 'cures' for the condition may be worse than the problem."

Beyond inclusive attitudes towards sports, female participation in the AOMAP made sense because of the Party's public advocacy for women of color self-defense in the mid and late 1970s. The paper covered the landmark JoAnn Little case throughout 1975 and helped organize rallies for her that drew hundreds of supporters. 20-year-old Little killed a prison guard who sexually assaulted her while she served time for breaking and entering. She faced legal ramifications, including the death penalty, for self-defense, but eventually became the first woman to receive an acquittal for using deadly force against an assaulter. [192] According to Emily Thuma, "Black Power and prison activists joined the forefront of the Little campaign, helping to situate it within a broader narrative of racist political repression and state violence."[193] For them, Little's "violent self-defense against a man embodied the white supremacist power structure" symbolized the long tradition Black self-defense and resistance."[194] When the OCLC hosted Little after the acquittal in August, she told the press that the Party had been one of her strongest advocates.

TBP kept similar tabs on Inez García's case, a Latina woman who shot her rapist but who required a retrial before exoneration. It also covered the cases of incarcerated women fighting for rights against state violence across the country, "placing the criminalization of low-income, racialized women's self-defensive violence at the forefront of conversations about social movement strategy."[195] Hence, the Party's support for women's self-defense existed in its written word and political organizing, even as members, including Huey Newton, failed to eliminate sexual harassment and assault in their own lives.[196] This placed the Party generally in

[192] For more, see Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 16.
[193] Thuma, *All Our Trials*, 24.
[194] Thuma, *All Our Trials*, 24.
[195] Thuma, All Our Trials, 11.
[196] For instances, see texts such as Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994). In her autobiography, Brown details the unwanted advances and abuse she suffered at the hands of men in the Party, including Huey Newton.

conversation with early 1970s CAP, whose theories and practices regarding gender and sex sometimes conflicted with one another.

But the everyday practices of the AOMAP captured the fighting and sporting spirit of Panthers' "feminism" most. As the program flourished, it helped young Black students use self-defense and combat sports to "make the link between mind and body."[197] As sociologist Alondra Nelson has indicated, serving the community and youth "body and soul" was a conceptual framework used throughout Panther programming.[198] I argue that martial arts instruction and its attention to the body and soul were part of a move toward what former OCS director Ericka Huggins now calls "spiritual maturity."[199] Spiritual maturity is a form of feminism and consciousness.[200] It challenges the "oppressive socialization of white patriarchal society" by prioritizing centeredness. Centeredness is achieved through an "awakening that is rooted in inner work…introspection, reflection, and self-analysis."[201] Historian Mary Phillips suggests that attaining this maturity for Huggins involved immersion in "literature, meditation, and/or writing poetry, journaling, [and] utilizing therapy."[202] By looking at McCutchen's instruction within the Black Power goals set by Huggins and Panther women, we can think more about how Black Power organizing focused on spiritual health and the role of the spirit in organizing.

Understanding spiritual maturity as "an ongoing process" urges us to take seriously that, as an example of "resilience and personal agency," spiritual centeredness is both a powerful example of resistance and a form of sensory liberation.[203] It also urges us to take seriously how

[197] Huggins and LeBlanc-Ernest, "Revolutionary Women, Revolutionary Education," 173.
[198] For more, see Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2011).
[199] Mary Phillips, "New Approaches on Women's Narratives in the Black Panther Party," (lecture, Conversations in Black Freedom Studies: Women in the Black Panther Party, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, New York, March 3, 2016).
[200] Phillips, "New Approaches."
[201] Phillips, "New Approaches."
[202] Phillips, "New Approaches."
[203] Phillips, "New Approaches."

martial arts practice would not have succeeded without the philosophies and visions of Black women. Though Panther women such as Elaine Brown, Ericka Huggins, Donna Howell, Joan Kelley, and Carol Granison would not have used the term "feminist," the move to be gender inclusive in liberation was at the heart of their Black radical organizing, within which McCutchen operated.[204] McCutchen's instruction thrived because of their permission and support. Logistically, day to day, the program would not have operated in certain years without the aid of Beverly Brown, who also took classes with McCutchen. She "set up the picture displays before classes…and make phones calls to parents about upcoming tournaments and events."[205] Indeed, as other historians have noted, outdated theorizations that mire the Panthers in inescapable misogyny erase how women's leadership and bodies altered the makeup of Party spaces.

VI. Conclusion: Toward a New Understanding of Black Panther Activism

On December 27, 1975, *TBP* featurette "On The Block" asked students between the ages of 4 and 8, "What do you like about the Oakland Community School [?]"[206] Multiple students answered physical education. One stated, I "like to do my exercises because it helps your body."[207] While the student did not specify martial arts, the paper conducted the interviews when martial arts and yoga were central to the physical education curriculum. The questionnaire's findings reflected that, without knowing, students learned health appreciation. It was important

[204] For more on how historians have decided to use "Feminism" to refer to Black women activists even when not historically applicable, see Ula Y. Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey: The Life & Times of Amy Jacques Garvey* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003) and Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). Though this method requires a presentist application of the term "feminist," there are ways that certain theorizations of the term resonate.
[205] McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 173.
[206] "On My Block: What do you like about the Oakland Community School?," *The Black Panther*, December 27, 1975, Microfilm. When included in the weekly issue, the "On My Block" featurette interviewed community members on a variety of topics.
[207] "On My Block: What do you like about the Oakland Community School?," *The Black Panther*, December 27, 1975, Microfilm.

to create spaces of health and appreciation given how certain spaces were off limits to black people in America, particularly to people associated with radical ideologies.[208] Through reflections about body, the students learned a keen knowledge of self, a form of Black Power liberation that students in CAP also learned. McCutchen used his classroom to promote harmony of self and unison with nature.[209] He taught the ability of willpower to tackle emotions such as anger.[210] For the program, mental and physical development were twin symbols of Black evolutionary power, like the yin and yang symbol that the program used for advertisements.[211] Willpower would allow the children "to remain inwardly calm so that, instead of fighting, they can work out things in a more humane manner, even though they are capable of really wiping someone out."[212] These lessons spilled over into blackboards in other classrooms teaching "Martial Arts Theory," where students learned that "the man who masters himself…has no need of another master."[213] This type of inner work grounded martial arts training as indispensable as both a sport and form of self-defense.

But by late 1977 and the start of 1978, questions surrounded the Party's future. Elaine Brown departed, and questions arose regarding Newton's efficacy and the Party's new directions. Funding for several of the survival programs and the OCLC dwindled. Eventually, the OCLC's All Open Martial Arts Program dropped to roughly 40 students.[214] Following the lead of Panther women who sustained the Party and its survival programs, McCutchen left the OCLC martial

[208] Just as children of the OCS were threatened and bullied in public school, the OCS was discriminated against. For instance, on July 16th, 1977, Oakland's YMCA denied OCS students and staff access to their facility due to a racist manager. Upon their return and an apology, McCutchen joined the staff in teaching recreation and increased the Y staff's knowledge through his presence and experience. But racism had momentarily limited the spaces available for OCS students to find bodily nourishment. See "O.C.S. Children denied Access to Central Y.M.C.A," *The Black Panther*, July 16, 1977, 3, Microfilm.
[209] "Breathing," *The Black Panther*, June 9, 1975, 23.
[210] For examples, see articles such as "Breathing and Action," *The Black Panther*, June 16, 1975. Microfilm.
[211] For ways that McCutchen tied physical and mental development together in his martial arts pedagogy, see articles like "Breathing," *The Black Panther*, June 9, 1975, 23 and "Concentration," *The Black Panther*, August 25, 1975, 23.
[212] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 70.
[213] Hoffman, "Reading, Writing, and Fair Fighting in the Oakland Ghetto," 70.
[214] See McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 194-204.

arts program in January 1979 and the OCS in November 1980. The new leadership vision for the Party and the AOMAP disillusioned him. Afterward, senior black and brown belts like Fred Morehead assisted the program's new head instructor Harold Holmes, who ran the AOMAP until its end. Holmes trained in martial arts while incarcerated but was ultimately less experienced.[215]

After his departure, McCutchen, like the former instructors of CAP, maintained his independent practice. He did so while going back to school to obtain degrees in applied psychology and behavior science.[216] In 1987, he reunited with several of his black belts including Morehead to create The Seven Shadows Association. In late 20th century iteration of the AOMAP's earlier work, they taught martial arts at in public recreation programs across East and West Oakland in the late 1990s and early 2000s. His continued teaching aligned with former CAP instructors who never lost the desire to teach. Just as Maasi, McCutchen later met former students who remained involved in community work in Oakland. They brought up how their experience in the AOMAP "transcended narrow physical techniques."[217] It is probable for these students that the program did as McCutchen hoped: that it "unconsciously and consciously tied philosophies of self-defense" to community engagement, proving that Panther pedagogy actually mobilized the regeneration of community leadership.[218]

The AOMAP's legacies extended beyond Oakland. It became the model for a free martial arts program in Los Angeles. The program began five weeks after the L.A. Panther chapter reopened in 1977, years after the infamous shootout between the US and the old chapter at UCLA.[219] The classes found their home at 5022 South Central Avenue. There, Terry Watts [sic], a second-degree black belt and tournament fighter, taught a tae kwon do class, and Cooks Kato

[215] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[216] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[217] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[218] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017.
[219] "B.P.P. So. California Chapter Initiates Martial Arts Program" *The Black Panther*, March 26, 1977, 23.

taught a class on T'ai-T'si Tao, "a street-styled Northern Shaolin Kung-Fu approach to combat."[220] Both Ware and Kato were skilled instructors. Ware started teaching tae kwon do in 1971. He belonged International Fighting Arts Association and regularly worked out with the same BKF that raised hell over tournament discrimination.[221] Kato was a "state-licensed" trainer and a disciple "of Sifu John So's Northern Shaolin Kung-fu Association in Los Angeles' Chinatown." The LA martial arts program was the 4th survival program the chapter initiated since rebuilding in January 1977. The first three were the programs for free food, free legal assistance, and free tutoring.[222] Eventually, the chapter developed a women's self-class as well.[223]

Black Panther martial artistry outlasted the Party's more visible calls for armed self-defense, despite the dominant image of the Party that continues to circulate and suggest otherwise. If we consider martial arts alongside yoga, as well as dance, we begin to see a vibrant role in the Black Power movement for movement arts. Black Panther Party martial artistry forces us to think about how serving youth and community, body and soul, is a way of movement building unto itself: movement building through actual movement.

[220] "B.P.P. So. California Chapter Initiates Martial Arts Program" *The Black Panther*, March 26, 1977, 23. There is a discrepancy as to whether Terry's last name is Watts or Ware.
[221] "B.P.P. So. California Chapter Initiates Martial Arts Program" *The Black Panther*, March 26, 1977, 23.
[222] They also implemented a S.A.F.E. Program and a Physical Culture Program. See "B.P.P. So. California Chapter Initiates Martial Arts Program" *The Black Panther*, March 26, 1977, 23.
[223] Steve McCutchen in discussion with the author, December 2017. Later, a school opened in Chicago based off the AOMAP as well. It was opened by a former member of the Chicago Panthers Stan McKinney. He probably opened several schools.

CHAPTER 4:

Kicking Black: The Circulation and Legacy of Black Power Martial Artistry in Popular Culture

Arising in the 1970s, Blaxploitation's defining films included urban action dramas, fantasy and sci-fi thrillers, pimp glorification stories, drug dealer "escapes the life" arcs, and law enforcement anti-heroes.[1] Pushing against what might be termed "integrationist film," which is often associated with Sidney Poitier in the 1960s, athletes turned into the new faces of Black Hollywood. They included football players like Jim Brown and Fred "The Hammer" Williamson, who earned multiple black belts and was known for a tackling style reminiscent of striking.[2] Named "Blaxploitation" in 1972 by NAACP and CORE activists who decried the genre, its opponents saw the films as reductive, violent, hypersexual, and crime-ridden representations of urban Black communities.[3] Others, activists like Huey Newton and actors like *Black Belt Jones'* Gloria Hendry, suggested the genre was radical and that it be called something else respectively.[4] The film scholar Ed Guerrero usefully penned this note about the name:

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[1] For more, see authors such as Stephane Dunn, "*Baad Bitches" and Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Yvonne D Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation: How the Black Action Film Heroine Changed American Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006); Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

[2] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 70. For more discussion on Poitier's films and their nuanced part in Black Film history, see pages 74-76 for more discussion on Poitier's films and their layered part in Black Film history.

[3] Stephane Dunn, "*Baad Bitches,"* 47, and Gerald Martinez, Gerald, Diana Martinez, and Andres Chavez, eds, *What It Is, What It Was!: The Black Film Explosion of the 70s in Words* and Pictures (New York: Hyperion, 1998). Leaders behind the naming included Roy Innis of CORE and Junius Griffin of the Hollywood NAACP. It also included Ralph Abernathy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. According to an oral history with David Walker in the collection, Griffin is the first person to use the name in an interview. See 54.

[4] See Huey Newton, "He Won't Bleed Me: A Revolutionary Analysis of Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss June 19, 1971," in *To Die For The People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton*, edited by Toni Morrison (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc. 1995), 112-147 and Issac Julien, dir. *BaadAsssss Cinema*. (2002; New York: Docurama, 2003), DVD.

> The epithet is usually associated with the production of the sixty or so Hollywood films that centered on black narratives, featured black cats playing out various action-adventures in the ghetto, and were released roughly between 1969 and 1974. But Blaxploitation might as easily and accurately describe the cruel injustice of slavery or, for that matter, much of the historical sojourn of black folk in America. Nevertheless…I confine the rubric to its narrowest contemporary understanding, which arises from the film industry's targeting the black audience with a specific product line of cheaply made, black-cast films shaped with the "exploitation" strategies Hollywood routinely uses to make the majority of its films.[5]

His use of film history grounds the term, rightfully noting that films classified as Blaxploitation were not wholly unique in their production. Arguments about general issues around exploitation existed in Hollywood before the genre. In a period when COINTELRPO tapped into community members and resources to undermine organizing, these films were scarcely the most exploitative measure aimed at Black communities during the Nixon Presidency.

Aversion to the name notwithstanding, it is widely held that Hollywood targeted Black viewers, especially urban youth, in order to avoid financial ruin. The Great Migrations led to an increase in the size of Black audiences in northern and western cities. They comprised Black residents who settled in cities as well as Black suburbanites who traveled to cities for weekend entertainment and comradery.[6] What perhaps made Blaxploitation films so popular is that they provided an alternative to uplifting films that centered improving race relations, like 1967's *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* starring Poitier. Critics of the films like *Guess Who* argued that

[5] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 69.
[6] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 83. Black movie going publics were underway as early as the early 1900s. The first Great Migration made the Black population in cities like Chicago swell. There, going to the movies became a form of community building as well as entertainment. See more on this, see texts like Davarian Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes: Modernity, the Great Migration, & Black Urban Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

their characters and plots did not connect to political and social struggles in the world outside of the theaters. In particular, *Guess Who* decontextualized race problems by distorting civil rights discourse and asserted that Black families needed to grapple with their own racial biases as much as White people.[7]

Tired of limiting tropes and didactic films, 1970's *Cotton Comes to Harlem* broke onto the film scene and helped create the new "pacing and formal visual-musical elements" of films that would follow it.[8] *Cotton*'s willingness to decenter white characters and portray more varieties of Black people and Black life quite literally paid off. Its $15.4 million gross was a lucrative sign, earning $13.2 million more than its budget. *Cotton* complimented films of another strand like *The Graduate*, which saw newer content creators grappling with American politics and the nation's future and ideals.[9] Blaxploitation reached the purses and minds of Black people who were invested in seeing the sarcastic and romantic stories that focused Black cultural politics, frequently using martial arts to convey themes of cultural rebellion. Equally as important, they portrayed a diversity of socioeconomic classes and allowed Black working-class characters to spring into new types of lead roles.

Financial pressure finally dictated that Hollywood draw in a new audience to see themselves or folks' representative of them on-screen:

> most obvious to observers of the late 1960s scene is that these films were made possible by the rising political and social consciousness of black people (taking the form of a broadly expressed black nationalist impulse at the end of the civil rights movement),

[7] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 78.
[8] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 81.
[9] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 82. *The Graduate* was released 11 days after *Guess Who* in December. It was part of a wave of films that included 1968's *Planet of the Apes*. Depicting the uncertainty of post-college whiteness and the animalistic subordination of whiteness respectively, these films appealed to the purses and concerns of white, college-age activists.

which translated into a large black audience thirsting to see their humanity depicted on the commercial cinema screen.[10]

As the 1960s progressed, television stopped buying expensive leases for films and big budget blockbusters started earning stark losses at the box office.[11] When other films were losing at minimum $15 million, a sum like *Cotton's* $13 million made for fiscal profit and efficiency.[12] By 1971, "black-oriented films" began seeing releases at greater numbers, "tripling from six features in 1969 to eighteen."[13] Independent filmmakers gained access to the market because studios concentrated their money to distribute films instead of producing them at expensive rates. Gordan Parks Sr., Gordan Parks Jr., Ossie Davis, and Melvin Van Peebles created classics like *Shaft*, *Superfly*, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, and *Watermelon Man*, the latter two of which were released on the same day in 1970.[14]

In this chapter, I use literary and film history, biography, and interdisciplinary film analysis to connect how this history of the rise in production of films aimed at Black people coincides with the history of Black martial arts. The analysis in this chapter departs from other texts that discuss the intertwining of Black martial arts history and popular culture by closely examining martial arts techniques and historicizing them. As demonstrated in the Introduction and previous chapters, martial arts practice had spread far and wide before the release of kung fu and Blaxploitation films. What occurred in the 1970s was not the rise of Black martial arts

[10] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 69-70. He goes on to say: "This surge in African American identity politics led also to an outspoken, critical dissatisfaction with Hollywood's persistent degradation of African Americans in films."
[11] Guerrero also notes that, alongside television, postwar foreign films chipped away at domestic cinema's popularity.
[12] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 82.
[13] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 82.
[14] This is after what Guerrero sees as persistent activism by the NAACP and ACLU to get Hollywood to overcome hiring discrimination. Protests began as early as 1963 and saw a Justice Department lawsuit in 1969. He says that the status quo remained unmoved in the decade. See 84-85 for more. Guerrero writes: "The important point about this frustrating chronology of fluctuating industry racism is that Hollywood is a system entirely motivated by short-term profit. Because of this, the industry is conservative and changes only when forced to do so by the combined pressures of multiple influences, no matter how just or important any single condition may be….So, by the end of the 1960s, the film industry had been aware of the consumer potential of blacks for years and had made empty promises to civil rights activists for years as well. Only when Hollywood found itself confronted with familiar, menacing conjunction of multiple political and economic forces did it begin to act."

practice nor community "fascination" with it. It was also not the beginning of its connection to Black gender formations. [15] Instead, I assert that popular culture reflected a historical trend by circulating images of Black community martial artistry and increasing their recognition. Countless Black heroes kicked ass and captivated moviegoing publics by drawing on expertise and inspiration from concurrent figures and Black politics. Studios' appeal to Black youth came from an ironic "acknowledgement of black power."[16]

I begin by looking at how Black Power and BAM themes surfaced in the novel, *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. It reflected motifs that dominated cultural production aimed at Black people and displayed patterns highlighted in 1970s films. I then turn to movies such as *Super Fly* and the film adaption of *The Spook* to interrogate how Black masculinity and martial artistry created a defining genre trope in the "training scene." Next, I analyze the relationship of martial arts to Pam Grier's life and career, asserting that martial artistry transformed Black womanhood on-screen by mirroring the transformation of women's lives during the Black Power Era. Finally, I conclude by examining how movies like *Cleopatra Jones* and *Black Belt* Jones force us to reconsider assumptions about the gender politics of Blaxploitation films.

Overall, this chapter illustrates that the same relationships I discuss in the organizational cause studies (of Black martial arts to U.S. militarism, Internationalism, White Supremacy, and gender) were at play in films and other cultural texts. Even if hidden or submerged, Black martial arts practice's emergence in Blaxploitation films can only be understood fully in the context of these relationships. Ultimately, content creators captured the importance of martial artistry to the implementation and legacy of the Black Power Era. Their Blaxploitation martial artists helped

[15] Sundiata Cha-Jua, "Black Audiences, Blaxploitation and Kung Fu Films, and Challenges to White Celluloid Masculinity." In *China Forever: The Shaw Brothers and Diasporic Cinema*, ed. Poshek Fu (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 2008.
[16] Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 85.

define some of the genre's biggest moments. Through a newly invented repertoire of images, they altered the representations of Blackness that circulated across the nation and instantiated news ways of viewing Black manhood and womanhood.

I. Laying Groundwork: Sam Greenlee, Autobiography, and Black Power Writing in the 1960s

Though this chapter is concerned with films released during the Blaxploitation moment, the foundation for its artistic production of Blaxploitation began as soon as the cultural influence of the Black Power Movement unfolded. Five years before John Shaft busted onto screens, Sam Greenlee published a novel that illustrated how authors and screenwriters could capture the impulse and spectrum of Black dissent and imagination of the Post-Civil Rights era. Its own film adaptation underperformed financially compared to its contemporaries, potentially because of the revolutionary content it portrayed.[17] But *The Spook who Sat by the Door* and its author proved that martial arts and Black power ideology could be wed successfully in cultural representation. A member of the Black Arts Movement group the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC), Greenlee's literary production created a useful cross-genre blueprint.[18] The East/CAP publication, *Yesterday…Today, and Tomorrow*, discussed in Chapter 2, printed excerpts from the novel in the pages before Jim Dyson's martial arts cartoons. Later film productions echoed its depiction of Black radical culture because BAM aesthetics and cultural politics united artistic mediums. In fact, *The Spook* can be regarded as one of the original cultural sources to

[17] Greenlee believed his film was pulled earlier and that its success was suppressed by government agencies like the FBI. Scholars think his viewpoints have some validity. See Martin, Michael T., Wall, David C., and Yaquinto, Marilyn. *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse in The Spook Who Sat by the Door*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017.
[18] Verner D. Mitchell, "Encyclopedia of the Black Arts Movement," in *Encyclopedia of the Black Arts Movement*, edited by Verner D. Mitchell and Cynthia Davis (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 243. For more on the OBAC, see James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

incorporate Black martial artistry as a central plot point, a formula many films later adapted to capitalize off the popularity of "karate" and Black empowerment. Greenlee finished writing his tome by 1965, yet it was released only a year before *Cotton Comes to Harlem* hit theaters. He spent several years shopping it around, receiving rejection after rejection from U.S. presses. Finally, in 1969, a U.K. publisher printed the anti-U.S. state novel.[19] *The Spook* follows the intentionally named Dan Freeman as he becomes the first African American to join the CIA. The crux of the story sees Freeman return from Washington D.C. to Chicago to lead a revolution using the skills he acquired during his time in the agency.

Upon first glance, the plot seems to be a fantasy inspired by the rumblings of Black activists. The realization of an urban revolution in multiple cities seems far-fetched now, but Greenlee's work pulsated with reality. The child of a talented performer as well as a union organizer, Greenlee's creativity and political awareness started early. He engaged in NAACP organizing as a Chicago teenager in the 1940s, and he witnessed white backlash against fights for equitable education. As an adult, he ran track at the University of Wisconsin while studying for a political science degree. After graduation in 1952, he spent two years in the armed forces, where he became a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army's 31st Infantry "Dixie" Division. Later, Greenlee spent three years at the University of Chicago doing graduate work in international relations. This led him to become one of the first African Americans recruited to the Cold War government agency, the United States Information Agency (USIA). During the 1950s and 1960s, Greenlee traveled through countries such as Pakistan, Indonesia, and Iraq. He excelled so much that his service was rewarded during the 1958 Iraqi coup d'état (also known as the 14 July Revolution). One of the first Black officials posted oversees, he remained in Greece after

[19] See Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 6.

he left the service. Greenlee visited America during the summer of 1965 and felt the flames of the Watts rebellion.[20] His fervent and dutiful actions during foreign service did not preclude him from pouring over the burning racial tension and anti-blackness in the United States. As he noted later,

> It was the time of severe unrest among the black community: King-led demonstrators were on the march, and there was anti-racist activity throughout the nation. Armed struggle had not yet begun, but I felt it inevitable in reaction to mounting police abuse. Returning to Greece, I gave serious thought concerning the possibility of an organized black revolution in the United States, and several months after my return to Mykonos, I abandoned the book I was writing at the time to begin the manuscript of *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*.[21]

He readily admitted that he drew upon his time in the postcolonial, Third World and his "personal and vicarious experience with armed revolution and guerilla warfare."[22] The Cold War period "convinced [him] that many of the same instruments of control during the centuries of imperialist domination (segregation, discrimination, the assault on indigenous languages and culture) were identical to those same measures utilized in the oppression of black America."[23] He promised himself that his protagonist would not be "physically or spiritually destroyed in a futile effort to confront American racism." Deriding what he considered the protocol of the "protest novel," Greenlee penned his "novel of defiance" to feature a lead that met "racism on its own military terms."[24] Indeed, Greenlee's knowledge of the "military terms" of American

[20] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary* Impulse, 25.
[21] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary* Impulse, 25.
[22] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary* Impulse, 26. In fact, he wrote his Master's thesis on the 1917 Soviet revolution.
[23] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary* Impulse, 26.
[24] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary* Impulse, 26. He also said that he wrote a protagonist who understood "the futility of appealing to the nonexistent conscience of white America."

imperialism was hauntingly precise. Because of this, The *Spook* pinpointed how Black Power martial artistry and Cold War military interventions worked together to inspire and circulate images of the revolutionary Black martial artist.

Though it is unclear as to whether Greenlee himself trained in martial arts during his time as a government agent, the detail he gives Freeman's martial artistry is incredible. Scanning the novel for the word "martial arts" yields the reader no results as the phrase did not have its dominance yet. But individually, judo appears 19 times in the text and jujitsu and karate appear three times each. In addition to sexuality and academic examination grades, the book describes "hand-to-hand combat" as one of the areas that caused recruits to be dropped from the CIA's recruitment programs. Early in the novel, on page 24 in chapter two, Greenlee quickly establishes martial arts' importance to his character's narrative. While in training to join the CIA, recruits are required to pass mandatory physical tests and partake in physical education classes. The most extensive scene written by Greenlee is in a judo class. A white CIA agent named Calhoun supervises the Black recruits and bullies them in the class though he is not the lead instructor. Calhoun's racialized aggression is evident in the text, exacerbated by Freeman's skill:

> The niggers would leave or Calhoun would break their necks. He broke no necks, but he did break one man's leg and dislocated another's shoulder. He was surprised and angered to find that Freeman had studied both judo and jujitsu and had a brown belt in the former and a blue stripe in the latter. He would throw Freeman with all the fury and strength he could muster, each time Freeman took the fall expertly.[25]

[25] Sam Greenlee. *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 23.

The tension between Freeman and the white man from North Carolina is palpable. He conjures images of another Carolinian White supremacist. The career politician John C. Calhoun hailed slavery and subservience as beneficial for African Americans. He failed to conceive of them as equals. Greenlee's Calhoun has a similar, central weakness: his refusal to "believe a nigger [could] whip him."[26] At the end of one session, Calhoun barks to Freeman, "we fight until you do [resign]. And you will not leave this room until I have whipped you and you walk out of here, or crawl out of here, or are carried out of here and resign. Do I make myself clear?"[27] Freeman responds, "Yes, whitey, you make yourself clear. But you ain't running me nowhere. You're not man enough for that."[28] Freeman, has been trying hard to maintain a low profile throughout his training course so he does not accidentally reveal his revolutionary side. However, Calhoun's challenge gives him a "limp, drowsy feeling."[29] He cannot back out of the testing ground of masculinity that is the militarized precision of unarmed self-defense.

What ensues is what I call "the training/dojo scene" in cultural productions. In a training scene in Black literature, film, comics, etc., a main character displays their commitment to improving their self-sufficiency and often demonstrates, either with a teacher or an opponent, that they are "arming" themselves for the world ahead. This ethos is evident across mediums. Espoused in his 1967 short play, *Arm Yourself or Harm Yourself,* Amiri Baraka writes that "Ain't no devil on this planet gonna put his bloody claws on me, brother Not no more, my man…not no more."[30] Though this statement is geared toward the so-called white male devil, it theorizes that no one should have the privilege of violating a Black man's physical well-being. Another character captures the feeling of helplessness when a man is unable to defend his body.

[26] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 26.
[27] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 23.
[28] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 23.
[29] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 23.
[30] Baraka, Amiri, *Arm Yourself, or Harm Yourself!: A Message of Self-Defense to Black Men!* (Newark: Jihad Publication, 1960).

He says, "[I] can't do nuthin. Cain't do nuthin…I'm sicka this muthafucking shit."[31] As the title of the play suggests, it is unjust for a Black man not to defend himself. Not practicing self-defense is harmful to one's health. Training scenes in works like Greenlee's evoke Baraka and exemplify a turning point in character's stories or a cathartic moment of personal triumph.

Greenlee writes the match with sophisticated knowledge of "international judo rules," meaning no "chops, kicks, or hand blows. Falls and chokeholds only." Greenlee's martial arts knowledge is apparent when his narrator uses terms like "*osotogare* [spic]", which is the name for one of the traditional judo throws.[32] Calhoun is a black belt and 15 pounds heavier than Freeman, yet the narrator dismisses Calhoun's rank advantage. He believes a black belt "signifies only that the wearer has studied judo enough to instruct others. The highest degree for actual combat is the brown belt." This distinction, though not a standard viewpoint in judo, served to diminish the rank difference between the men. Freeman viewed Calhoun as big and untalented. Though he monitored classes taught by the instructor Mr. Soo, [33] Calhoun only achieved his rank because of continuous practice. Freeman felt he had an innate athletic advantage. The narrator notes that Freeman had analyzed Calhoun and was familiar with Calhoun's most comfortable techniques, right-handed hip and shoulder throws.[34] Greenlee writes in detail how "when Calhoun swung into position for the hip throw, his back to Freeman, Freeman simply placed his hand on [Calhoun's] back and, before he could be pulled off balance and onto the fulcrum of Calhoun's hip, pushed hard with left hand, breaking contact."[35]

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[31] Baraka, *Arm Yourself, or Harm Yourself!*.
[32] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 23. It is typically spelled "Osotogari."
[33] It is important to note that Soo, whose last name is found in different iterations in China, Japan, and Thailand, is himself Korean. This might be a bit of flattening on Greenlee's part. But given his knowledge of martial arts, it is likely there is an explanation for why the judo instructor is not Japanese. Again, it is important to remember that judo was an internationally circulating art and practiced in many countries. This would have also been a time when Korean immigration to the U.S. began to increase in the 1960s.
[34] This is the type of judo knowledge that Jim Dyson showcases in his cartoon for The East/CAP Brooklyn.
[35] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 24-25.

Freeman considers staying on the defensive in their second match, but eyes Calhoun "squatting Japanese-style on the other side of the mat, the hatred and contempt naked on his face." Freeman decides, "[even if] I blow my scene, I got to kick this ofay's ass." Mentally he declares, "When you grab me again, whitey, you are going to have two handfuls of 168 pounds of pure black hell." These moments of martial arts contestation are important interpersonal battle grounds for Black men. Freeman almost breaks his intentions to bring about a greater revolution in order to have his own individual revolution. Freeman decisively wins the next match by "savagely" throwing him over his hip. Calhoun is so enraged he declines to bow to Freeman, only following decorum when reminded and prompted by Mr. Soo's unnecessarily broken English: "Calhoun-san. You a judoka. You will return bow of Freeman-san." This moment of martial arts decorum forces Calhoun to accept that his racial bigotry cannot save him from admitting Freeman's racial equity and sporting dominance. In his head, Freeman contemplates his capacity to stop himself from "killing this white man." The idea of staying in the academy and achieving his goals prevents him from such an outlandish act but he served Calhoun the "ass-kicking" he had coming.

Freeman forces Calhoun to believe a Black man can beat him when he ends a match with several techniques in rapid succession. Calhoun is left with a dislocated shoulder and in need of the assistance of the instructor Mr. Soo to pop it back into its socket. Freeman leaves the scene not only victorious but having chased Calhoun into a request for an overseas assignment, never to be seen again as he "disappear[s] into the Middle East."[36] But Freeman's moment of reveling in judo glory and his individual revolution reveals "holes in his mask" that he must repair. This scene, which becomes a fast-paced scene in the movie adaptation, is an

[36] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 27.

important demonstration of Greenlee's commitment to unarmed self-defense as a site of individual contestation and as a practical skill for unarming and alarming racists. But it also central to understanding the Black Power martial artist's impact on Black manhood. For many Black men, Black Power masculinism, as a political and gender orientation, could not be fulfilled by dominating and subjugating Black women. Rather its promise could only be realized by using self-possession to liberate oneself from the power of white men's racism. And rather than end with 1960s literary works, the depiction of this promise bled into Blaxploitation films.

II. The "Training Scene" and Depicting Black Men's Self Worth in Blaxploitation

Martial arts choreography seeped into Hollywood by 1962 when Frank Sinatra briefly showed off martial arts choreography in *The Manchurian Candidate*.[37] But it derived new meanings when Black filmmakers took incorporated martial artistry in their films. An early example of this is 1970's *Watermelon Man*. Directed by Air Force veteran Melvin Van Peebles, the film watches its main character go to bed as a racist, white middle class patriarch and wake up as a Black man the next day. Moving through the world in his new shoes shows him that anti-black racism is prevalent and suffocating. Eventually he loses his job and family. In the movie's final scenes, his soon-to-be-ex-wife calls to check in. They begin talking about his workout routine. Previously, as a white man, Peter Gerber had been obsessed with physical fitness. Every morning he uses a rowing machine and heavy bag in his house. He consistently imagined that he was trying to outrun or out box a Black man. As the movie closes, he tells his wife that he has started working out in the evenings. The camera pans to him working out in a

[37] See Jared Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip! How Bodybuilders, Soldiers and a Hairdresser Reinvented Martial Arts for America* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), 116. He was trained by Bruce Tegner. Born in Chicago, Tegner began training in martial arts starting at young age.

basement with other Black men. Sequestered in a basement, they lift brooms in a deadlift motion from their toes and finish by heaving it overhead, contracting their abdominal muscles. The brooms are reminiscent of wooden bō or staff used in martial arts training. Collectively, they thrust the broom forward toward the camera in the direction of an upward poke strike. The film freezes on Peter's face before closing with the credits. This ending seems to have been purposeful by director Van Peebles.[38] That Peter Gerber would start as a white bigot using physical culture obsession to undermine Black men is no shock. The importance of beating Black men at physical contests was a notion as old as scientific racism. It would famously occur in combat sports when audiences hoped a "Great White Hope" would strip the boxer Jack Johnson of his title.[39] That Gerber would then experience racism and transition his physical culture to learning self-defense and martial arts weaponry is also no surprise. His training scene symbolizes the possibility for unarmed self-defense to self-liberate men coming into a Black Power masculinity. By 1970, activists had demonstrated that Black men who experienced racial oppression and social frustrations could simultaneously sweat it out and learn to defend their bodies against white hostility. *Watermelon Man*'s ending captured Van Peebles' Black Power ethos in a way that audiences would have recognized as logical and accessible. This symbolic move toward self-liberation appeared in a film that was only the second Hollywood studio film directed by an African American.

Like Van Peebles, Gordon Parks, Jr. seemed to believe that martial artistry, or rather its depiction, gave "oppressed young people an immense sense of personal worth and the skills for

[38] There is evidence to suggest that Van Peebles departed from the vision of the movie held by screenplay writer, Herman Raucher. Raucher did not want the movie to become a symbol for Black Power. Van Peebles made *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* a year later as his Black Power opus.
[39] For more on this, see books like Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012). Other moments in sport are important as moments of contesting racial science, just as Jesse Owen's Olympic victories.

collective struggle."[40] His film *Super Fly* went above the hints to martial artistry in *The Watermelon Man*. It also went beyond the quick snippets of aggressive kicks performed by Richard Roundtree in Gordan Parks Sr.'s 1971 Blaxploitation opus, *Shaft*. Like Greenlee, it is unclear if Parks, Jr. ever practiced martial arts. But he served in the army between 1956 and 1957 and afterward, traversed Greenwich Village like Amiri Baraka.[41] Both experiences and environments could have exposed him to Asian-descended martial artistry and its philosophy. His father, Parks, Sr., also photographed the Nation of Islam at their martial arts practices in 1963 (See Chapter 1, Figure 1), and Parks Jr. went on to later direct Jim Kelly's martial arts skills in 1974's *Three the Hard Way*. As a result, it is unsurprising that his direction accurately depicts the importance of unarmed self-defense to Black men's freedom in 1972's *Super Fly.*

In the film, widely considered a genre definer, the main character Youngblood Priest demonstrates that in order to claim some sort of autonomy over body and life, one must train in martial arts. He uses unarmed self-defense to complete a personal journey of Black manhood and exemplifies martial arts infiltration into Black, urban communities. In the film's opening scenes, we see the cool, aspiring dope dealer ambushed for his product. In a surprise attack, during which he is thrown to the ground, Priest kicks one of his attackers in the abdomen while on the floor. Though rattled, he jumps up and chases the other attacker out of a building through decrepit back alleys and apartments in Harlem.

Eventually, he catches his mugger, takes back his dope, and angrily kicks the man's ribs. It is crucial at this point in the film that he tracks down his attacker in order to protect his product rather than to avenge the damage that had been done to his body. Priest is athletic and

[40] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001, 132.
[41] C. Gerald Fraser, "Gordon Parks Jr., Film Maker, Dead," *The New York Times*, April 4, 1979, https://www.nytimes.com/1979/04/04/archives/gordon-parks-jr-film-maker-dead-director-of-super-fly-and-other.html.

able-bodied. He leaps over fences and onto ladders and stimulates women in the bedroom. However, other Black dealers and the white men who control his trade insist on reminding him that, despite his physical capacities, he does not have agency. Priest, though excellent at dealing, wishes not to spend the rest of his life in the trade. His partner in the dope game cynically asks, "What the fuck you gon do [after you stop selling]?," implying that the only feat Priest is capable of accomplishing professionally is superior dealing.[42] His partner serves as a reminder that Priest has limited power and that he cannot accomplish what he wills.

Nevertheless, Priest is not convinced that he is destined to remain powerless. As the movie progresses, he becomes more ambitious with his skills. Against his partner's advice, he decides to pursue a dope sale so large that it will facilitate his retirement. As he strives to pull himself up by his snake-leather shoelaces, the audience witnesses with a seemingly unimportant "training scene": a karate lesson, squished between the other responsibilities of his routine. It appears as recreation. However, close analysis of this scene reveals that it is central to Parks' plot and character development in a fashion reminiscent of Greenlee's style. There is an intense focus in Priest's eyes. The way that he moves suggests swift intent and not bourgeois disinterest. The way he gets back up after being throw by his teacher signals that he is chasing a type of personal growth. In the opening scene, Priest he was unable to prevent the bruises he sustains. Through the karate lesson, Priest learns to defend his body with more precision and intent than is required to simply protect the product, fashioning his body to be self-sufficient. In this way, we see the cinematic version of the training scene in Greenlee's novel. Priest equips himself with the tools to win the fights that lie ahead of him, whether in drug ridden stairwells or barren outskirts of town. *Super Fly*'s training scene is a symbolic plot device and moment of

[42] Gordon Parks Jr, dir. *Super Fly*. (1972; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2004), DVD.

meaning-making replicated seriously throughout the genre in *The Spook* film and *Cleopatra Jones*.

By the end of the movie, Priest goes from being pushed around by his first set of attackers to fully handling the White men who attack him during the film's conclusion. He uses his martial arts skills to bring his dreams of escape to the forefront.[43] When the white kingpin tries to tell Priest that he is merely a pawn in the white man's game, a narrative pivotal to the Black Power experience unfolds. Priest defiantly proclaims that "You don't own me pig and no mother fucker tells me when I can split!"[44] Priest then defeats the kingpin and his two henchmen. Standing up for himself and defending his body against "Whitey" is crucial. In this same moment where three White men attack an outnumbered Black man, Priest demonstrates that he is capable of defending his right to an independent existence. He recaptures the part of his Black masculinity that the racism of white society had stripped away. This scene and many others like it in Blaxploitation films were some of the first instances in cinematic history where a Black man physically and fearlessly resists a white man in battle.

For Priest, learning to defend his right to a crimeless existence is linked to fighting toward a better existence overall. By fighting the man who supposedly owns him, Priest also fights against the doubters who are convinced he does not have the wherewithal to accomplish anything outside the extralegal economy. If one takes another look at the karate lesson, the scene can be read as demonstrating Priest's growth not only as a martial artist but as a person. His movements and intention reveal to himself, his teacher, and the audience that Priest can be a better person and that he can work towards that self-improvement. The scene also makes it clear

[43] It is a moment almost taken from Eldredge Cleaver's violent and misogynist autobiography, *Soul on Ice*. However, instead of using Black women as practice for the act of raping White woman, Priest used his Black muggers as practice for the day that he would use martial arts against White men. Unlike Eldridge Cleaver, Priest directly fights the force that tells him he is worthless.
[44] Parks Jr, *Super Fly*.

that Priest is afraid, for valid reasons, of going back to being viewed as nothing and being owned by "Whitey" and dope his entire life. A common teaching in martial arts practice is that "You should be able to believe in yourself to be able to climb the highest mountain. Or just go against whatever is thrown your way. You should be able to look at adversity in its face and believe in yourself to get what you want."[45] *Gōngfu*, the overarching name given to martial arts with Chinese origins, literally translates to "human achievement through great effort." In the words of Bruce Lee, the purpose of the martial arts training is "to cultivate the mind, promote health, … [provide] efficient means of self-protection against attacks…[and to develop] confidence, coordination, adaptability, and respect."[46] As Parks, Jr. successfully conveyed, there is a certain courage that martial arts enables and that courage contributed to Priest's personal liberation.

Drawing on Black Power rhetoric, Gordon Parks' film illustrated that if someone disrespects you verbally, he may be willing to disrespect you physically as well. Both the police that rough Priest up during the middle of the movie and the kingpin from the end of the film verbalize their abuses before enacting them on Priest's body. However, by the finale, Priest has learned to become untouchable. In other words, he has learned to become "weaponful" even when weaponless. It is fruitless for White men to assert themselves upon him. This power that Priest feels and then enacts against his opponents is borrowed from Black Power martial artist's lesson about mastery of self. Priest dreamed of getting out, but he materialized his thoughts by mastering his body. Just as instructors from CAP and the Panthers did, Parks' film highlighted the practicality and necessity of an active mind, body, and soul connection.

[45] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting,* 148.
[46] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting,* 132.

If Blaxploitation's training scene cemented itself as a part of the genre in *Super Fly*, its integration into the narrative found perfection in the 1973 film adaption of *The Spook*, which Sam Green wrote the screenplay for and co-produced alongside its director, Ivan Dixon. Since Greenlee was heavily involved in its production, it carefully follows the book's plot and message. When the film opens, it finds fictional Senator Hennington bothered by his reelection. His wife and Willa, a young Black woman, point out to him that he is losing the Black vote because of his pro-law and order stance. To undo his setbacks, they suggest he accuse the CIA of hiring discrimination because of its lack of Black spies. In subsequent scenes, the audience sees the fallout of his choices. The CIA reluctantly enlists Black men of all hues and sizes for an intensive, months-long recruitment program, testing their mental and physical capacities. They tell them, "you men represent the best of your race," and ask them what they will say when interrogated in foreign embassies about U.S. racism. One recruit responds, "I'd point out that they also have racial and religious troubles, that a thing like that isn't resolved overnight, and that our country is firmly behind racial progress and great strides are being made here."[47] A likely jab at Dubois's own discarded idea of the talented tenth, most of the men hailed from the Black bourgeoise and the best Historically Black Colleges and Universities, such as Howard and Fisk Universities. But Dan Freeman was the exception. He spoke and dressed like it too, as if he had not attended a similar institution or grown up in a stylish city like Chicago. [48] He is hidden in early scenes where recruits learn to make bombs, activate a parachute, and release gunfire. When he is finally pointed out by supervisors, it is only to use his history as an excellent college athlete to explain his

[47] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 137.
[48] Greenlee, The Spook, Who Sat By the Door, 12 and 18.

adroitness in scuba diving lessons. The lack of his prominence is on purpose. His superiors note that he has "a way of fading into the background."[49]

His internal passion only becomes perceptible eleven minutes into the film. A group of men try to entice him to join them on a weekend jaunt to Washington D.C.. After grueling weeks of training, they are finally allowed to leave campus. The men converse and Freeman points out, with biting irony, "[none of us were] picked for our militancy, were we?"[50] Egos quickly get involved and a trivial spat occurs. One of the other men, once encouraging Freeman to tag along, angrily asks him to step outside with him. From his chair, Freeman looks up at the man and with quiet ferocity mentions, "No, no, you don't want to step outside with me. Because, baby I would kick your ass."[51]

He means it, too. Two scenes later, after a sexual encounter with a sex worker, Freeman and the other recruits are shown on the mat in judo class. The depth of scene, which, as noted above also occurred in the novel, is important to track across the mediums. Screenplay notes simply stipulate in the scene notes that "Calhoun and Freeman bow to each other and begin fighting. Freeman goes down three times" and "Freeman and Calhoun fight again. Freeman takes down Calhoun four times. Calhoun concedes defeat."[52] Despite the bare-bones description translated to the screenplay, the film scenes unfurl with similar insight into judo as the novel. Thrust into the scene, the audience instantly sees the instructor Mr. Soo maneuver a student from a wrist lock into a flip, landing the man squarely with a resounding thud. He then deflects a strike and executes another flip. From the edge of the mat, the white CIA supervisor, Calhoun, yells "matte" to signal the end of the match, which means wait in Japanese. In total, 6 recruits

[49] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 138.
[50] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 141.
[51] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 141.
[52] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 145.

populate the class. Mr. Soo calls, "Rei!," to command the students to bow and then he ends the class. As the other men walk off, Calhoun calls out to Freeman, claiming that he needs to stay for further instruction. From under his mustache, chest hair, and black belt, he breathes, "Mr. Freeman, I don't think you people belong in our outfit. I don't have anything against the rest of the group. They . . . they just don't measure up. But you, I don't like." Calhoun finds no irony bemoaning African American's place in the CIA "outfit" while wearing a Japanese karate uniform. Calhoun professes that he is annoyed by what he views as Freeman's false humility. "I don't like your style. Now this is a team for men. Not misplaced cotton pickers."[53] Ushering Freeman an ultimatum, he wishes nothing more than for Freeman to resign or fight him. In a memorable line marrying martial arts and civil rights, he remarks, "Now your black belt matches my own, so you won't be able to whine brutality. Equal opportunity you people claim you want?"[54]

Calhoun orders Mr. Soo to serve as the "shinpan" or referee. [55] The two blackbelts grab at each other and their *randori* speedily begins.[56] Unlike the novel, Calhoun is shown to have the upper hand. After a brief initial foray, Calhoun gets the literal jump on Freeman and sends him flying with a reaping, sweeping throw, pronouncing his victory with a loud kiai. Calhoun claps and awaits his opponents rise yet quickly throws him again. Bubbling resentment begins to surface on Freeman's face when he is swept a third time. Upon losing thrice, Calhoun baits Freeman with the line, "Rest?" To which Freeman, with a cool rage, hands extended in a defensive stance, responds, "No. There ain't no rest for the weary."[57] In contrast to when confronted by his fellow recruits, Freeman is emotionally engrossed in the challenge. Freeman

[53] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 144.
[54] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 145.
[55] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 145.
[56]Randori is freestyle sparring practice.
[57] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 145.

snatches part of Calhoun's gi by the collar and throws him almost 360 degrees onto the floor. He follows with two more victories. Each of his moves is technical and swift, demonstrating a large toolkit of throws that harkens to the hundreds of throws a black belt *judoka* knows.[58] In the final tussle, Calhoun attempts a comeback and cuts his legs backward against Freeman's shins to try a sweep. With each turn, he thrusts his body violently into Freeman's torso and tries to displace Freeman's hips. Unfortunately for him, Freeman blocks the body checks and picks him up high in the air using Calhoun's own momentum. He decisively crashes Calhoun down on the floor with a final painful thud. Freeman controls Calhoun's white body and follows him onto the floor, leaning all his body weight down to prevent Calhoun's escape. Freeman place his forearms conveniently and tactically to choke the agent. Turning over in pain, Calhoun gives up and taps. Mr. Soo swoops in to snatch Calhoun off the floor and wake him by applying pressure to his neck from behind. The Asian instructor, whose labor and instruction have been rendered as background in these moments, takes the final word, asking, "Calhoun-san, are you all right?"

It is important that Freeman's triumph and the discussion of whether to pass him are buttressed by Freeman's first and second sexual encounter with women. His first encounter is with a sex worker known to us only as Dahomey Queen (DQ). After his training scene, we meet DQ's foil, Freeman's college girlfriend, Joy. Following Freeman's time with Joy, we see the two CIA agents responsible for overseeing the program, Carstairs and the General, review his file. He is about to be the only man to pass, but there are crucial details they need to know. As the General tries to legitimize "the Calhoun incident," i.e. the defeat, to himself, Carstairs reminds him, "Sir, in fairness to Calhoun, Freeman has been studying judo privately for years."[59] After Carstairs confirms that Freeman has been "involved in civil rights activity as a

[58] Judoka means "Judo student [ka]."
[59] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 146.

student but nothing pink or radical," the General asks him if Freeman sleeps with men or women. Carstairs responds, "Women. No hint of homosexuality. Developed a liaison with a prostitute on U Street. Also has a girlfriend in Chicago."[60] It is crucial that the General finds peace with Freeman's judo skills as he also verifies that he has neither nonnormative politics (leftism, communism, Marxism, etc.) nor nonnormative sexual preferences. He cannot be accepted into a violent state apparatus with a rebellious political nature or a sexuality that cannot be controlled with a heteronormative, capitalist state building project. Problematically reduced to her radical tongue-in-cheek moniker, DQ becomes the important witness to Freeman's necessary, compulsory heterosexuality and his physical aptitudes. Freeman names her DQ because she reminds him of a queen from the former African kingdom of Dahomey (now in present-day Benin). She is taken aback by this and snickers yet asks to see the book where he sees her "likeness." When she is questioned at a bar by another white CIA operative, she confirms he is as strait (or perhaps straight)-laced as they want him to be. He is not hooked on any drugs and does not gamble. She attests to this nonviolent nature, but she insists that other men can tell he is the quiet, "just don't mess with" type. She acknowledges that even though "he ain't my man…I know that if I got in trouble, he'd be in it…he'd be real bad once he get going, too."[61] Before the scene ends, DQ laughs off the question about his "sexual habits" and is even confused at the suggestion. Precisely because her job as sex worker puts her in contact with all types of men, her testimony solidifies his masculinity in ways that other agents cannot. Her fondness for Freeman returns later in the film when she acts as an informant for Freeman, undermining the CIA's attempts to use her. Still, DQ as a symbol with no real name leaves much to be desired. Reduced to a prop, DQ's representation leaves the revolutionary potential

[60] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 147.
[61] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 148.

of women and sex workers to be fleshed out by films that star Black women, as discussed in sections below.

After DQ's interview, Freeman passes his exam and becomes a part of the CIA. He stays for several years, first working as the "Top-secret Reproduction Center Section Chief," i.e. the "Negro" relegated to making copies in the basement. But he eventually works on the general's own staff. Though we do not see it in the movie, in the novel in the period after he passes, he learns more self-defense, adding "karate to his repertoire of judo and jujitsu." Additionally, he spends time "on the range, firing pistols, rifles and shotguns, as well as…automatic weapons."[62] When he joins the General's staff, he "[takes] target practice three times a week, practice[s] judo, jujitsu and karate and [has] one weekly session of boxing with a retired former middleweight contender."[63] At this point, his cross training, though not uncommon in this period, harkens to what is termed modern-day mixed martial arts training.

Greenlee, taking seriously his revolutionary intentions, writes Freeman as a well-rounded self-defense man both in the novel and screenplay. This attention to holistic self-defense, as both armed and unarmed, explains the specificity given to martial arts training scenes and their centrality to a 1970s iteration of rebellious, Black manhood. When Freeman teaches young, Black gang members unarmed self-defense and tactics of warfare to prepare them to be revolutionary sleeper cells, he does so with the same precision as he learned. He equips them with tools to disarm agents of the state so that they can throw them and then overthrow the government. They train in a basement and follow the same Japanese martial arts style of respect and classroom decorum. By the end of their training, they can not only use their

[62] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 33.
[63] Greenlee, *The Spook*, 48.

bodies as weapons, but they can articulate the same knowledge about effective guerrilla warfare that Freeman did to pass his CIA exam.

Just like *Superfly,* Freeman's martial arts journey ends with a final battle that he cannot finish without hand-to-hand self-defense. It is important to remember that though this movie comes out after *Superfly*, Greenlee ends his novel with Freeman's martial artistry in 1966. In the movie version, Freeman finds himself with a gun to held to his forehead from behind by Dawson, a Black friend who is now an anti-revolutionary cop. Dawson tries to take the moral high ground and shames Freeman for training teenagers, who at this point he has sent underground in cities across America to train others in martial arts and revolutionary theory. Freeman protests this accusation: "Who else am I gonna involve? People like you and me? Nah-uh. The kids are our only hope, and I got to them before they got jailed or killed or turned into Dawsons. And now they'd do anything to be free."[64] Dawson quips, "Who said you were free, man?," lyrically evoking Freeman's symbolic last name one last time. With his final fury, Freeman warns, "Well, Daws, even on the wrong end of your gun, I'm a lot freer than you are."[65] Instantaneously, he turns so that he his head is no longer on the center line of the gun's barrel, a move commonly taught to evade gunfire during gun self-defense. He drops to his knees and bats Dawson's mid-arm away, sending the gun flying across the room. He sends a punch soaring into Dawson's abdomen, grabs his leg and brings Dawson down to the ground with him. They wrestle. Dawson holds his gun and Freeman grabs an ice picker from the table. Freeman manages to stab Dawson fatally, taking a single bullet in the process. Just as he dispatched of Calhoun, a modern-day representative of legislators who denied Black people freedom, Freeman dispatches of someone who could not see his own unfreedom. Limping, Freeman

[64] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 192.
[65] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 192.

struggles to his feet and makes a call. In the last scene, his students appear at his apartment to take Dawson's body away. They are startled to see Dawson, Freeman's "main man" dead on the floor. But Freeman barks that their revolution is not about killing "white strangers." There are other black folks whose politics will try to prevent the revolution Freeman imagines. He points out that "anybody who gets between us and freedom has got to go." He reminds that them the U.S. troops landing in Chicago to quell their uprising are partly Black. Those Black troops, if they do not join the cause, might kill them.

This sobering moment of the realities of their training is telling. There is nothing symbolic or performative about the unarmed self-defense he has taught them. He fully anticipates that they will use everything he has taught them, such as making a bomb using accessible resources. By movie's end, his students have sparked uprisings in Oakland and seven other cities, inciting a "state of national emergency."[66]

The stakes in *The Spook* prove to be much different than those in *Super Fly*. The latter signifies the master of self and martial arts needed for individual change while *The Spook* represents the master of the self and unarmed self-defense needed to produce a collective political revolution. Both forms elucidate how 1960s and 1970s cultural producers understood the multifaceted nature of Black Power politics and their impact on approaches to Black agency and Black manhood. Importantly, they tackled issues of "being free" and getting out from under the control of white men.[67] And though not all Blaxploitation films were explicitly neo-slave

[66] Martin, Wall, and Yaquinto, *Race and the Revolutionary Impulse*, 193.
[67] Just as Freeman tells Dawson that he is a "lot freer" than he is, there is a moment in Super Fly when Priest too takes a moment to say that all he wants is "Just to be free." See Joshua K. Wright, "Black Outlaws and the Struggle for Empowerment in Blaxploitation Cinema," *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men* 2, no. 2 (2014), 76, https://www.doi.org/10.2979/spectrum.2.2.63?seq=1.

narratives, reconstructing modern stories about escaping to freedom, the various forms of freedom exhibited by Blaxploitation heroes "still equaled power."[68]

Nevertheless, the emphasis on revolutionary and rebellious Black manhood and martial arts in many of the early Black films of the 1970s did not completely capture the impact of images of defiant, Black bodies on American culture. The practice of Black martial arts would not have changed the representation of Black political and cultural politics onscreen by solely recognizing the rise of Black men weaponizing their bodies. Black women, though in the background of movies like *Super Fly*, *The Spook*, and *Shaft*, take center stage and become drivers of Black martial artistry's on-screen legacy, paving the way for martial arts to be incorporated into more than masculinist training scenes.

III. Beyond *Foxy*: Historical Portraits of Pam Grier and Black Martial Artistry's Womanhood

Despite the memory of Blaxploitation as overwhelmingly sexist, ass-kicking Black women of the 1970s also defined the moment. In the same April of 1971, moviegoers could watch *Sweet Sweetback* and the women's prison genre and its defining film, *The Big Doll House* starring Pam Grier. Grier eventually become the one of the most famous faces of Blaxploitation. When she starred in 1973's *Coffy*, she kicked off Black women-led, titular action films. As a historical figure, Grier's biography, like Greenlee's, attests to how Black exposure to Asian descended martial arts shaped Blaxploitation. Her life further breaks up the narrative of when and where Black women began training. Instead of starting in the late 1960s and 1970s as many of the women discussed in other chapters, Grier learned martial arts on

[68] For more on the relationship between narratives of escape, slavery, and Blaxploitation, see texts like Wright, "Black Outlaws and the Struggle for Empowerment in Blaxploitation Cinema."

military bases like many Black men, but as part of the first generations of military children who could do so.[69] Per the Introduction, this is not shocking when one considers how, as a branch, the Air Force systematized martial arts training.

Grier's life deals with the intersecting networks of militarism, gender, cinema, feminism, and martial arts, as discussed in other parts of this dissertation. In many ways, her narrative parallels those of early men become martial artists in terms of how the Cold War and an interracial transnationalism spurred her martial artistry. When she took her first breaths, her parents lived in New Jersey because her father was stationed at the Fort Dix Air Force Base.[70] Clarence Grier had enlisted and was a noncommissioned officer.[71] Soon after her birth in 1949, the family drove across country in a '48 Buick to Colorado, his next transfer. His future transfers included the Air Force base in Columbus, Ohio.[72] Grier recounted the discrimination her father and family faced in the late 1940s in her biography, *Foxy: My life in Three Acts*. This included housing discrimination, being forced to live off base to find good housing, and being forced to use the segregated buses of the Jim Crow North, which would often zoom by.[73] Grier noted that "some bases were more liberal than others, and at our base, the military complex worked hard at creating the 'look' of equality."[74] On base, they were able to experience integrated recreation "in the sandboxes, in the swimming pool, and on the bike trails."[75] Though she experienced racism as a young girl of color, she also witnessed racial diversity.[76] While

[69] Pam Grier and Andrea Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts* (New York: Springboard Press, 2010), 50.
[70] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 3.
[71] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 8.
[72] His transfers also included Travis Air Force Base in Fairfield, California, a city in the Bay Area. See, Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three*, Chapter 6.
[73] Grier and Cagan, Foxy: My Life in Three, 5.
[74] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 8.
[75] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 7-8.
[76] It is also important to note that the Grier family has several racial backgrounds. One of her grandfathers, Raymundo Parilla, was Filipino. She also had relatives who were Native American. This seems to include her grandmother and an uncle. See Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 8 and 10.

spending time on her grandparents farm in Wyoming, she lived among relatives who were Filipino and Native American.[77] Not only affected by U.S. racial politics and hybridity, Grier lived abroad in Cold War England during the 1950s while her father briefly was based in Europe. Driving through the English countryside, she saw

> the consequences of World War II…Evidence of violence and destruction were everywhere. I saw areas that had been utterly destroyed by bombs, and people rebuilding their broken worlds…I learned at a young age, by seeing it with my own eyes, what a war could do to people, their families, their culture, and their homes. When I met my dad in Germany or France during those two extraordinary years, I saw it there, too, where people were exerting tremendous efforts to rebuild. This was a large dose of international politics for a young girl, and I came away with understanding and feelings that were well beyond my years. In the meantime, my mom and Mrs. Lofton educated us kids about Nazism, socialism, and Communism. I was now a member of a global society where war-torn countries were visibly struggling to rebuild.[78]

Grier's recollection of her past is poignant. She became a more aware young woman because her girlhood was shaped by international and interracial experiences. Upon moving back to Denver, she lived in a neighborhood with Korean families who "were worldly and accustomed to living around people who were different."[79] Japanese families lived in the neighborhood too and "owned the landscaping companies." This 1960 era Denver felt like Swindon where she had

[77] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 8-10. She also recalled shopping at a Korean deli.
[78] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 38.
[79] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 45. Her mother bought a house through money she earned as a nurse and through money she borrowed from her family.

lived in England, and according to her "where people from diverse ethnic backgrounds were living harmoniously and helping each other."[80]

Grier faced prejudice and bullying from other students before she left for the U.K. Being in the U.K. provided a reprieve but when she returned to Denver, the bullying returned. In one instance, a tall, blonde girl she did not know wrote her a message that said would "'see [Grier] in the school yard when class was over."[81] Outside, the other girl shoved her so hard her books fell and "started circling her arms round and round like a windmill."[82] To defend herself, preteen Grier used the karate and jiu-jitsu she had studied at one of the military bases. Grier "put an end to the fight with one shot to Christine's side."[83]

As an adult, Grier moved to California in hopes of attending UCLA for college. While trying to attain California residency, she met a Trinidadian-American basketball player from New York City named Ferdinand Lewis Alcindor, Jr. who had just been drafted by the Milwaukee Bucks. Before he converted to Islam and before he starred opposite Bruce Lee in *The Game of Death*, they shared their love of martial arts. As part of their romance, they watched Akira Kurosawa's internationally renowned 1954 class, *Seven Samurai*, numerous times.[84]

Grier was taken with UCLA's Black Student Union and their conversations about "free speech, civil rights, and the Vietnam War" as well as the messages of women she calls

[80] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 45. Grier says she was never bullied in England but that her Swedish friend was because the other children mistook her for German. However, it should be noted that even if Grier did not experience or remember experiencing racism, anti-blackness still existed in forms unique to Great Britain given its relationship to colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean.
[81] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 49.
[82] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 50.
[83] It was not until after that they learned they had been tricked into fighting by their peers.
[84] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 87. Their romance ended when Grier refused to convert and marry then Kareem Abdul Jabbar, whose interpretation of Islam allowed for little freedom for women.

feminists.[85] She cited the Third World Women's Alliance's 1970 "Black Women's Manifesto" as an important text of the time that critiqued racism and capitalism. Grier quoted the following line from the manifesto, as if to mark values shaping her at the time: "The black woman is demanding of a new set of female definitions and a recognition of herself as a citizen, companion and confidant, not a matriarchal villain or a step stool baby-maker. Role integration advocates the complementary recognition of man and woman, not the competition recognition of same."[86] While in California, her mother would send her articles about women's rights from the Colorado newspaper she read. [87] Grier stated that her mother, a nurse who bought their house, became "the role model" she used for her performance of "the industrious nurse" in *Coffy*.[88]

These biographical influences seem to be present in the performances she delivers in movies beginning in 1970 and 1971. Grier asserted that men like Roger Corman "hadn't thought of a woman of colour [for these roles] until they found out that I could do martial arts."[89] Her martial arts and her time spent on the family farm, where she learned to ride horses, helped her do her own stunts.[90] Indeed, her action and fight scenes are evident as early as her role in *The Big Doll House*, which Corman's company released. Out of her films, her most

[85] These women included "Angela Davis, Coretta Scott King, Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, Germaine Green, and Bella Abzug." Some of the women in this eclectic group would not have considered themselves feminists at the time. See Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 86 and 277.
[86] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 87. She takes the time list out the members who wrote the pamphlet: Gayle Lynch, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Maxine Williams, Frances M. Beal, and Linda La Rue.
[87] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 86. Reflecting backward, Grier believed women's growing independence influenced her mother who worked to support a dream of a keeping a family home. See page 44. Because Black women and women of color had often been working out of the home, Grier's understanding of this situation is not wholly accurate. The biography states: "the women's' movement, where you earned the bacon yourself if needed, you protected your family, covered for your husband any way you could, and did your best to never flaunt that in his face."
[88] Grier and Cagan, *Foxy: My Life in Three Acts*, 54.
[89]Tina Hassannia, "Pam Grier on influencing feminism as the original bad-ass female action hero," *The Globe and Mail*, October 1, 205, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/film/pam-grier-on-influencing-feminism-as-the-original-bad-ass-female-action-hero/article26623031/.
[90] Larry Getlen, "Fox: my life in three acts," *New York Post*, April 18, 2010, https://nypost.com/2010/04/18/foxy-my-life-in-three-acts/.

famous is perhaps 1974's *Foxy Brown*. It is remembered for being the pinnacle of 1970's Black women's representation in Blaxploitation, between Grier's attitude, style, hair, and personality. In it, one of her most notable lines happens during her time in a white-majority lesbian bar, imagery similar to that of the original Cleopatra Jones. Foxy enters the bar abruptly to escort another woman. But a butch-esque or androgynously dressed white woman has been talking to her and wants Foxy to back off. She exclaims, "I've got a black belt in karate" and raises her hands to prepare for blocks and punches. As the action gets under way, Foxy retorts, "I've got a black belt in bar stool" and breaks one over the woman's back. This line is iconic yet ironic, given Grier's own fighting background is in martial arts and not street-smart brawling. The use of the built environment as a weapon is not only a street fighting technique but is also taught in martial arts schools that think consciously about real-world applications. The Panther's AOMAP exhibited this principle when they imitated how to fight from the ground when one is out on street pavements.[91] Just as fascinating, *Foxy Brown*'s title scene and opening credits betray Grier's familiarity with martial arts. Amidst the flashing technicolor backgrounds, Grier dances and shimmies across the screen. Toward the very end, her swaying hips transform from dance moves to karate moves. The black outline of her body flows into a series of kicks, blocks, and punches on top of the opening's bright colors. Her movements are executed in a way that resembles forms from karate, making for a funky opening to the film.

Though martial arts appear sporadically throughout the film, an unnecessarily graphic scene of sexual assault occurs when Foxy is kidnapped. This serves the audience a sobering reminder that Black women's martial artistry is in conversation with the movement against sexual assault. The scene disrupts the autonomy that the movie has built around Foxy Brown's

[91] "O.C.L.C Martial Arts Program Stages Spirited Winter Festival," *The Black Panther*, February 28, 1976, 23.

strong, badass body. But it is not unsimilar to Grier's own life, who became a survivor at the age of 6 and again after moving to L.A. Martial arts alone, in her life or on the screen, could not eliminate the threat of gender and sexual violence, reminding us why antirape movement activists sought holistic reform to the issue.[92] In a way, both *Foxy Brown* and *Coffy*, both of which are written and directed by white American Jack Hill and depict successful violence against their titular Black women, foiled Max Julien's heroine *Cleopatra Jones*. But in truth, Foxy's story is not often memorialized by the grotesque scene. Much like Grier herself, many of Foxy's memorable moments are when she is kicking ass and the film ends on her and a few Black Panther-esque revolutionaries successfully beating the mob.

As highlighted in other chapters, we forget how crucial martial arts training was to Black women until we return to the archive. Organizers in Black Power and Black feminist groups learned unarmed self-defense to ensure their ability to participate in liberation as a fully well-rounded revolutionary individual. They needed to be able to defend themselves physically even without a firearm. The history of unarmed self-defense in African American communities' centers Black men while erasing the Black women who actively participated in these trainings as early as the late 1960s. This male-centered narrative has erased the Black woman who actively participated in martial arts as early as the late 1960s. Yet photographic and autobiographical evidence demonstrate that as soon as martial arts training became readily accessible in Black communities like South Central Los Angeles, Black woman joined. For example, in the Black

[92] Grier talks about how her first assault changed her self-esteem and happy, confident nature as a child. Both her first and second assault were committed by perpetrators she knew. Studies have shown that most incidents of assault and battery and rape occur with someone the survivor knows. There is no reason to believe that anything short of changing the social and political dynamics of gender norms and interpersonal relationships will eliminate these heinously violent situations. Studies have further shown that it is harder to speak and move (out of fear, shame, and guilt) when you know who is assaulting you. For more on activism against gender and sexual violence, see texts such as Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019) and Martha McCaughey, *Real Knockouts the Physical Feminism of Women's Self-Defense* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

Karate Federation's visual autobiography *BKF Kenpo,* their photography archive places Black women and girls alongside Black men in martial arts classes as early as 1967.[93] In her dissertation, "I am a Revolutionary Black Female Nationalist: A Womanist Analysis of Fulani Sunni Ali's Role as a New African Citizen," historian Rondee Gaines describes how, for the women of the Republic of New Africa (RNA), martial arts practice was integrated into their trainings in 1968. For the RNA, creating revolutionary black female nationalists required "paramilitary training...guerilla combat…[and] communication strategies" as well as martial arts.[94] She astutely points out that while, "a number of black feminist narratives characterize the male militancy of the Black Power Movement as too aggressive and assertive, female activists have an accessible history displaying surprisingly similar attributes."[95] In 1970, the Black Women's Alliance expanded into The Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) as women from the Puerto Rican Socialist Party joined former members SNCC to fight for the liberation of all oppressed women of color.[96] In a 1971 treatise, they boldly stated that women needed to be "fully trained and educated in martial arts as well as in the political arena" as a core tenant and organizing strategy."[97] They "helped to create a political imaginary that eschewed masculinist protection and asserted the right of racialized and colonized women to take up arms in defense of their own bodily integrity as well as the integrity of the collective body of the oppressed."[98] It is not coincidental then that Pam Grier cited the same TWWA who wrote about martial arts

[93] See Steve Muhammad and Donnie Williams, *BKF Kenpo: History and Advanced Strategic Principles* (Burbank, CA: Unique Publications, 2002).
[94] Gaines, Rondee, "I am a Revolutionary Black Female Nationalist: A Womanist Analysis of Fulani Sunni Ali's Role as a New African Citizen and Minister of In-formation in the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Africa," (PhD dissertation, Georgia State University, 2013), 47, http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_diss/44.
[95] Gaines, "I am a Revolutionary Black Female Nationalist,"47.
[96] Kimberly Spring, *Living for the Revolution Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 47-49.
[97] Third World Women's Alliance Pamphlet, Third World Women's Collection, Chicana por mi Raza Digital Memory Project and Archive. Originally sent by Historian Maria Cotera in Word Press blog post message to students in the Winter 2016 course, "Readings in Women of Color and Queer of Color Praxis," January 20, 2016.
[98] Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials,* 25.

education when she mentioned her politicization. A year after TWWA published their pamphlet, Safiyah Bukhari joined the Black Panther Party in New York City. As mentioned in the Chapter 3, she, along with women like Assata Shakur, learned martial arts for self-defense and to increase overall physical fitness and health. They practiced in places like Morris Park and Central Park in Harlem. In her biography, Safiyah Bukhari describes the martial arts training as necessary because "[we needed] to develop and maintain the discipline to carry through...objectives...[and increase]...confidence in ourselves."[99] In 1972, Brooklyn's East movement and cultural center published its graphic cartoons discussed at length in Chapter 2. They suggested radically conscious women learn martial arts for their "spiritual and mental control and self-defense" and to combat sexual violence enacted upon Black women by men. The young women martial arts at the Oakland Community Learning Center continued these legacies in mid to late 1970s.

All together, these women co-created a larger moment where Black liberation was inextricably tied to the future of womanhood and feminism. They worked in conversation with women as discussed in groundbreaking works like *Living For the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Springer 2005); *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (Theoharis, Woodard, and Gore 2010); *Florynce "Flo" Kennedy: The Life of a Black Feminist Radical* (Randolph 2015), and *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul* (Ford 2015). Black activist women and their likenesses then transformed Black political culture, not the inverse. Those who practiced unarmed self-defense too changed the nature and memory of Black radicalism in ways previously unseen. Collectively, Black characters in television, film, and comics are indebted to the pioneering women who learned martial arts and self-defense as part of their work for Black and Third World liberation.

[99] Safiya Bukhari, *The War Before: The True Life Story of Becoming a Black Panther, Keeping the Faith in Prison, and Fighting for Those Left Behind* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2010), 40.

IV. *Cleopatra Jones*, Black Kicks, and Depictions of Revolutionary Womanhood

How we can connect Black women's lived experiences to depictions of Black Power female martial artists in television and film to revolutionary Black womanhood? Such connections are vital for understanding the shift in representation of Black women in popular culture. Martial artistry helped shift representations of Black women in popular culture from the passivity and silencing of other cinematic tropes to heroines "extremely adept at taking caring of [themselves] in tough situations."[100] I take a cultural studies and visual culture approach to film and by analyzing the intersection of Black woman's empowerment and martial arts seen in works such as 1973's film *Cleopatra Jones* and 1974's *Black Belt Jones.* The martial artistry performed in these texts is not merely a contrivance of Hollywood but rather is rooted in the images and practices of Black women martial artists detailed above. Heroines such as Cleopatra Jones and *BBJ*'s Sydney changed the way Black womanhood was conceived on-screen and reflected how Black women of Pam Grier's generation presented themselves in the Black Power and Black Feminists movements. I analyze Cleopatra Jones in-depth because the *Cleopatra Jones* series was the first to star a Black martial arts character as a lead (predating Jim Kelley 1974's *Black Belt Jones* by a year) and because Tamara Dobson is arguably one of the first female action stars of Hollywood besides Grier. It is also seen by some as the "first blaxploitation film to use martial arts as part of its promotion."[101]

Several generations of scholars have argued that the filmic depictions of Black women changed between the early and mid-20th century and the so-called Blaxploitation era. Scholars like Yvonne D Sims write that, previous to Blaxploitation, Black women were primarily

[100] Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation,* 121.
[101] See Eric Charles Pierson, "The 1970's as Hollywood's Golden Economic Age: A Critical, Interpretive Analysis of the Blaxploitation Cinematic Movement" (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2000), 128, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/304597118?accountid=14667 and Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation*, 93

portrayed as figures such as the Mammy and the Jezebel. The image of the mammy builds on the idea of Black women as white family care takers, harkening to post-Reconstruction white fantasies remembering the southern plantation lifestyle, imagined without the violent realities of being an enslaved domestic.[102] The Jezebel and exotic other/tragic mulatta tropes paint Black women across the skin color spectrum as sexually voracious and promiscuous and as living outside of Victorian ideals of femininity as depicted in genre-defining films like 1915's *The Birth of a Nation*.[103] In the 1970s, the popular mammy and caregiver tropes of Black women of the previous decades gave way to brash, strong, ass-kicking, "don't mess with me" Black women who were sexually attractive even if oversexualized. These figures never fully disappear but get complicated, updated, or slightly revised with Blaxploitation heroines. For example, as Sims usefully writes about sexuality: "Though many characters were objects of a joint white black male gaze similar, the sexiness of black female characters in Blaxploitation is one they are depicted to control, rather than just have imposed on them, signaling a departure from both the basic sexually lewd destruction of the jezebel and the asexuality of the mammy."

The kick-ass Black woman, as spy, super-agent, or concerned community member/lover, inverted the American action hero and intervened into a white male dominated sphere of James Bond and Clint Eastwood cowboys, alongside new Black male action figures like Shaft.[104] These new characters' physical capabilities were unlike the "masculinized" physicality of the mammy, taking a step toward giving Black female characters more voices and personalities.[105] Their representation of Black womanhood stems from the strength and contrarian attitudes toward

[102] Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation,* 31.
[103] Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation,* 33. As Sims writes, "On-screen, [the] mammy, the tragic mulatto, aunt Jemima, and [the] sapphire functioned as a way of affirming Victorian womanhood by reassuring audiences that African American women were not a threat to the European ideals of femininity."
[104] Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation,* 30.
[105] Sims, *Women of Blaxploitation,* 32 and 75.

oppression and the U.S. nation state presented by Black women during the Freedom Struggles of the 20th century. Thus, it is interesting to see how Black Power aesthetics altered Black women onscreen from defenseless mammies into vivacious survivors and fighters.

I build on scholars such as Sims who understand the significance of martial arts to the Blaxploitation heroine. I go beyond their arguments to stress that martial artistry is the vehicle that completes the reconfiguration of actresses into Black Power inspired action heroines, imbued with independence and self-possession. Martial arts practice is central to this shift in popular perception of Black women in ways that are underemphasized. Cleopatra Jones, played by Tamara Dobson, illustrates how martial arts became an inseparable part of identifiable Black Power womanhood, catapulting female martial artists onto the big screen. To be able to pull off her "don't mess with me look," to be able to be a "bad mother shut yo mouth," in order to kick ass and be cool, one had to literally know how to kick someone's ass while maintaining their cool. You can't "kick someone's ass" with a gun. This phrase, now common to African American Vernacular English slang and Black expression of bravado and self, hinges upon a Black woman, man, or nonbinary person being able to, with their empty fist and cock limbs, defend their body while being unabashedly Black.

Furthermore, I expand upon scholarship by visual culture scholar Jennifer D. Brody who counters early Black film studies scholars like Donald Bogle. In 1980, Bogle argued that "black women do not identify with [heroines like Cleopatra Jones] because the exploits of the latter are too far removed from the realities of black women's lives."[106] In her article "The Returns of Cleopatra Jones," Brody insists that such opinions undersell and undertheorize the Black female audience and deprive Black women of the ability to read characters like the tough, striking (pun

[106] Donald Bogle, *Brown Sugar: Overs 60 years of America's Black Female* Superstars (New York: Continuum, 2007), 90.

intended) Cleopatra Jones as having relatable qualities of Black womanhood. Brody reflects, "why should such films reflect 'everyday realities'" when they can provide a space for Black woman, including black queer women, to imagine their own badassness?[107] Given what we know about Black women's martial artistry and activism, I argue that Blaxploitation heroines reflect the interconnectedness between "everyday realities," Black women, and film.

In her first film, Cleopatra Jones or "Cleo" mimics the gender politics of these women by using her martial arts to defeat heroin dealers. The audience understands how she is able to do this when, in one scene, she squares off in a karate stance against her comrades, the Johnson Brothers, in their home dojo. While relatively brief, this "training/dojo scene" is a crucial moment of meaning-making. Unlike *Super Fly*'s Priest, who is seen acquiring the necessary training to defeat white drug lords, Cleopatra Jones already has the knowledge. In her "training" scene, Cleo playfully squares off in a wide, karate stance called the horse stance with her hands outstretched in fists protecting her body. As she circles around her comrades, ready for a fight, she dons a colorful robe that resembles yet contrasts to the karate *gis* worn by Melvin and Matthew Johnson. Her waist is conspicuously absent of the black belt that the brothers are wearing. Previous to her entrance, they are practicing advanced techniques, demonstrating how versed they are in karate. They square off against her, two versus one, as equals. Melvin and Matthew's decision to face her together indicates that Cleo is even more skilled than they are and capable of handling multiple opponents. Instead of breaking into a fight, the scene ends with the Johnson Brothers acknowledging that Cleo is a pretty and pretty bad sister active in protecting the community.

[107] Jennifer DeVere Brody, "The Returns of 'Cleopatra Jones,'" *Signs* 25, no. 1 (Autumn, 1999): 100, http://doi.org/10.1086/495415.

In order to defend her community from toxins such as heroin and white supremacy, Cleo fights her way across L.A. to face a white female character named Mommy. Mommy is both the boss who runs a major heroin ring in Cleo's neighborhood and a problematic conflation of lesbianism, whiteness, and evilness. One of the film's most dynamic scenes is toward the end of the movie before she faces the drug capitalist Mommy. In it, Cleo takes out one of Mommy's top henchmen, a white man who uses Jim Crow vernacular to refer to Cleo as "girl" and one of the Johnson Brothers as "boy."[108] Because she doesn't have a gun in the scene, Cleo uses her wits and long legs to stop him. Gracefully, she hook kicks him to the stomach and performs a strong axe kick that requires her to lift her long, Black leg as high as she can and crash her heel and thigh into her opponents' back. His immobilization signifies a victory for the Black women's physicality in a way neither tied to the Jezebel nor the Mammy. This moment is made even more real because of the imposing figure of Dobson. "Before the movie," the 6'2" tomboy and model "took karate lessons, fencing lessons, [and] motorcycle lessons," building a stunt repertoire like that of Grier.[109]

Though the movie's depiction of Cleo as a Black Power female martial artist is poignant, her background and the plot are complex. She is both a defender of the community and a CIA operative, resembling more conservative or liberal Black nationalists who fought for racial uplift and community development from within the state. The film, written and produced by the African American writer and actor Max Julien (known for his role in 1973's *The Mack*), was, like so many films, released before the rise of carceral state studies, which critiques how policing drugs in Black communities did more harm than good and resulted in the hyper-incarceration of

[108] *Jack Starrett, dir. Cleopatra Jones* (1973; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 1999), DVD.
[109] Mary Campbell, "Tamara Dobson on the Rise," *The Sun,* Sep 23, 1973, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/docview/541258119?accountid=14667.

Black people.[110] Released at a time when Nixon-era politics co-opted Black Power rhetoric and supported Black Power capitalism, *Cleopatra Jones* also fails to seriously engage the complexities of Women's liberation and Black feminism. The original employs a Black martial arts femininity that sees service, integration, race consciousness, and heteronormativity as the pillars of Black Power and nationalism. However, Brody suggests that the shifts in women's activism between 1973 and the release of the sequel, *Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold*, in 1975, changed the series.[111]

She advises that the second film departs enough that even Black queer audiences can disidentify with Cleo's gender and sexuality as presented. A queer reading imagines the film's world beyond heteronormativity to "see" Cleo as a representation of badass nonnormativity:

> while one might "buy" Cleo as a black queer (the ambiguity between being a black queer reader and having Cleo perform black queerness for one's own pleasure is deliberate), one need not own or rather understand her as such. In other words, one might come to see that 'the desire to be like can itself be motivated and sustained by the desire to possess: being can be the most radical form of having' (Fuss 1995, 114). In this case, black queer and/or lesbian readers might see in/as Cleo a representation of their own identities and desires (assuming in theory that such a diverse category could cohere).[112]

Casino of Gold is ripe for this reading as it replaces a male romantic lead with an Asian, female partner named Mei Lin who has constant homosocial, flirty banter with Cleo. In Mei Lin, Cleopatra finds a kindred spirit whose training room is filled with weights, punching bags, and

[110] Sheldon Keller also helped write the screen play. Both he and Jack Starrett were white.
[111] Supposedly, Max Julien refused to participate in making the sequel. The author is still looking for a citation on this.
[112] Brody, "The Returns of 'Cleopatra Jones,'" 102.

guns. They playfully challenge each other throughout the movie as they fight bad guys as a queered martial arts team and take each other as dates to the movie's penultimate battle royale. Their dynamic even makes room for a different argument about the series' relationship to homophobia. Though again a white lesbian is Cleo's rival, Mei Lin's existence opens space for a queer coalition that is jointly against white lesbians whose politics reify and benefit from racism and capitalism in ways detrimental to women of color. It would be dubious to think that signals anything other than unfulfilled queer potentiality, but as I consider in the epilogue, the imagery left enough possibility that 21st century writers and directors could create Black queer, feminists' martial artists anew.

Keeping these points in mind, both movies are driven by a strong, anti-white corruption, pro community service, Black Power story. This story would not be possible without changing the abilities of Black woman and their martial artistry. As a cultural production, the *Cleopatra Jones* series accurately acknowledges the long legacy of self-defense and community uplift that Black woman participated in that is submerged in representations like Mammy characters. Though armed struggle and strength have always been prerequisites to be a Black woman in the United States, 1960s and 1970s martial arts practice reminds us that hand-to-hand combat and self-defense are integral to both the practice and image of a revolutionary Black woman.[113]

Gloria Hendry's character Sydney in 1974's *Black Belt Jones* (*BBJ*) is also helpful when theorizing the representation of Black women's martial arts. Sydney uses her fight skills more than any of Pam Grier's characters and as often as Cleopatra Jones. However, she is less often discussed or considered. Jim Kelly's most famous film is the magnum opus of the Black martial arts film. It stars well-trained martial artists, features several martial arts fight scenes, and

[113] This is true because armed struggle has a limited capacity to be deployed. As articulated throughout this dissertation, the limited capacity stems from the inability to always carry firearms.

centers martial artistry in the plot, not just as a plot device. Jim Kelly's titular character comes to the aid of a dojo owner named Pop Byrd played by Scatman Crothers, who also voices the urban Kung fu cartoon character *Hong Kong Phooey*. Pop is harassed by a drug dealer named Pinky to hand over his school or the money that Pinky loaned Pop to build it. Pinky himself is experiencing a shakedown, as the mafia comes to him to collect his debts. Before Pop is murdered, the audience learns that the school belongs to his daughter, Sydney. When Sydney returns home, she immediately seeks revenge. In an iconic scene circulated in the trailer, Hendry walks in on some men playing pool and questions, "Who's Pinky?"[114] In return, she is asked, "What you want him for, lil mama?"[115] Her entrance is not taken seriously, but she coolly replies, "I ain't yo mama." Sydney glares at the men and unbuttons the bottom of her dress. The men leer with glee. Instead of opening her body for pleasure, Sydney creates more flexible room for limbs to fly. In a barrage of attacks, Gloria grabs one man by the wrist and roundhouse kicks him in the stomach, kicks another man in the head, chops a third in the throat, and slams a fourth into a pool table. Some of the men she defeats in her big solo fight are real Black martial artists. One of her victims is Donnie Williams, a co-founder of Los Angeles's Black Karate Federation mentioned in the Introduction and Chapter Three. He started the group alongside Steve Muhammad, who was Jim Kelly's instructor in *Enter the Dragon*. Williams also played an instructor in that film. Several months after *BBJ*, he also appeared in the Isaac Hayes starred film, *Truck Turner*. Though he began his martial arts training as a youth in Texas studying Shotokan Karate, he began his journey to becoming a "superb kicker" after years of studying taekwondo.[116] His first exposure to the art occurred while stationed in South Korea as

[114] Robert Clouse, dir. *Black Belt Jones* (1974; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2003), DVD.
[115] Robert Clouse, dir. *Black Belt Jones*.
[116] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Kenpo: History and Advanced Strategic*. 14.

a part of the U.S. Navy. When he returned to the U.S., Williams studied taekwondo with Byong Yu, the same teacher that taught the Black Panther Party's instructor Steve McCutchen.[117]

Though actresses such as Hendry did not have training in martial arts or stunts, Grier and Dobson compellingly displayed Black women's capacity to do martial arts if cast, thereby opening doors for others. Hendry's performance in *Black Belt Jones* stands out as she persuades audiences that she can defeat such veteran practitioners like Donnie Williams. To an untrained eye, it is unapparent that she had no prior training. Long-time *New York Times* movie critic, A.H. Weiler, scoffed that *BBJ* was the "latest of the slew of kick-and-slash melodramas."[118] He viewed it "as basically silly as many of the previous, similarly action-packed adventures it imitates and is as obvious as a karate chop."[119] But he quipped that Hendry set the film apart. The Russian born critic went so far as to call Sydney "a photogenic soul sister who is just as roughly efficient as her tough, stoic partner."[120] In a notable moment where the film evokes a Black feminist influence, Jones looks at Sydney while he is on a phone call. She is preparing her gun for a fight, but he snidely tells, her, "Now what are you doing? Nah, nah you stay here till I get back. Do those dishes or something."[121] Incorrectly assuming he can keep Sydney away from further action, Sydney aims the gun she is fiddling with. One by one, she shoots the dishes Jones references. Afterward, she turns back to him, and says snidely back, "The dishes are done."[122] Not only is her Black martial artistry influenced by the politics of the moment, but so too is her rhetoric.

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[117] Muhammad and Williams, *BKF Kenpo: History and Advanced Strategic*. 14.
[118] A.H. Weiler, "Screen: Kick-and-Slash: 'Black Belt Jones' Is Played by Jim Kelly," *The New York Times*, January 29, 1974, https://www.nytimes.com/1974/01/29/archives/screen-kickandslash-black-belt-jones-is-played-by-jim-kelly-the.html.
[119] Weiler, "Screen: Kick-and-Slash."
[120] Weiler, "Screen: Kick-and-Slash."
[121] Robert Clouse, dir. *Black Belt Jones*.
[122] Robert Clouse, dir. *Black Belt Jones*.

Movies starring the likewise untrained Jeanne Bell also fed the market, seeking to capitalize on Black female action heroes. These films included *TNT Jackson*. In it, Bell's character, Diana "T.N.T" Jackson underwent scenes of martial artists as well as nude scenes like Grier's characters. Yvonne Sims argues that, despite lacking a weak, unoriginal plot, the movie "took martial arts a step further than Dobson's heroine by using it as the primary mode of defense" rather than guns, becoming one of the first truly Blaxploitation martial arts flicks.[123] The film was released in June of 1974, two months after *Coffy*, but only in the Philippines. It took until January 1975 for it to be released in the United States. She starred alongside fellow *Playboy* playmate Rosanne Katon in the less remembered films too, like 1976's *The Muthers* and *She-Devils in Chains* (later called *Ebony, Ivory and Jade*). [124] Performances like theirs make it impossible to think that Black women's representation as ferocious (not just physically strong or more masculine than other women) could have come out of any other period. None of the older cultural tropes (the Mammy, Jezebel, etc.) included Black women's capacity to destroy white men with the balls of their feet rather than their sexual guile or child-like incompetence. Female martial artists then debunk scholars and critiques that women in 1970s "Blaxploitation" films possess little redeeming qualities. Though the hypersexualization of Black women in films like *TNT Jackson* was inescapable, it was not the totalizing feature of their representation.

These representations were never too far from the complicated neo-imperial politics of the Cold War, particularly U.S.-Philippine relations during the reign of Ferdinand Marcos.[125]

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[123] Simms, *Women of Blaxploitation*, 20. In her footnote on page 202, Simms claims that it was "one of the first blaxploitation movies to merge martial arts as a crucial component of the storyline, particularly with an African-American heroine."
[124] The author does not yet know why, but Bell's stage name is spelled multiple different ways in various films billings, such as Jeanie, Jean, and Jeanine. Her name at birth was Annie Lee Morgan.
[125] For more on Marco's dictatorship and the U.S.'s support, see Ferdinand E. Marcos, Notes on the New Society of the Philippines, (Manila: Marcos Foundation, 1973); Henry Kamm, "Filipinos Support Marcos Take-Over In Hope of Reform," *The New York Times*, October 30, 1972, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/10/30/archives/filipinos-support-marcos-takeover-in-hope-of-reform-filipinos.html; and Eric Pace, "The Fall of Marcos: Two Decades as Philippine Chief; The Marcos Years: From Vow to 'Make Country Great' to the Public Revolt," *The New York Times*, February 26, 1986,

While the Southeast Asian country was under Marcos's martial law, a slew of exploitation films were shot, written, and directed by Filipino creators like Cirio H. Santiago and Eddie Romero. They made smalls inroads into Hollywood with films like *TNT Jackson* and *The Muthers* at a time when filming in the Philippines was as financially alluring and successful as Black women's kicking itself. Representative of that era's power, Filipino filmmakers and Black actresses deeply affected a young white boy who devoured their films, Quentin Tarantino. When he became a director, he unoriginally appropriated many tropes of Blaxploitation to build a monetarily successful career through films like *Jackie Brown*, which starred Grier as an homage to herself. Furthermore, he named Vivica A. Fox's assassin character after Bell in his gory martial arts slasher 2003-2004 series, *Kill Bill*, recasting the Black martial artists for 21st century consumption.[126]

V. Conclusion

In this chapter, I connected the archival research on Black Power and martial artistry of the previous chapters to the history of Blaxploitation film and its legacies. Blaxploitation films repeatedly used the visual resistance encapsulated by Black martial artists. Of the dozens of films that can be classified within the genre, a significant portion of them have at least one demonstration of martial artistry. The empowering representations of Black bodies punching and overthrowing *by* throwing has been played with since the genre ended, as well.

As time rolled on, the 1980s only featured one Black martial artist starred film, Berry Gordy's *The Last Dragon*, starring Taimak. The legacy of Black Power martial artistry still circulated in films like 1988's *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka* and in 1990s television shows like

https://www.nytimes.com/1986/02/26/world/fall-marcos-two-decades-philippine-chief-marcos-years-vow-make-country-great.html.

[126] Her character's real name is Vernita Green, but she is living under the pseudonym Jeannie Bell.

Martin, which featured a character named Dragon Fly Jones. Some of these later productions were parody homages that lost touch with the political efficacy or seriousness given to martial arts performances. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, movies like *Rush Hour* had relegated martial practice to Asian characters only. In buddy cop and hip-hop martial arts crossover films like *Cradle 2 Da Grave*, nothing seemed to remain of Black activist's coherent ideologies about martial art's importance. But as I discuss in the Epilogue, the late 2000s and the 2010s created inclusive cinematic approaches that engaged Black empowerment, liberation, and martial artistry seriously.

Overall, it would be ahistorical to romanticize Blaxploitation, especially since it gave way for Hollywood to develop "more subtle and masked forms of devaluing African Americans on the screen."[127] As Guerrero writes, "when Hollywood no longer needed its cheap, black product line for its produced survival, it reverted to its traditional and…stereotypical modes of representation, as the industry eagerly set about unplugging this brief but creatively insurgent black movie boom."[128] Ironically, the same conditions that ushered in the genre, ushered it out: "As black critical reaction to the violent, drug-dealing pimps and gangsters of Blaxploitation formula sharpened, and Hollywood became less economically dependent on the genre for short-term profit, Blaxploitation came to a speedy demise."[129] Indeed, even though many films that featured martial arts were complex and broke from the mold that encased Blaxploitation, their individuality could not outrun the material to which it was compared.

I argue, in the time that it did succeed, Black martial artistry in 1970s films helped to break apart stereotypes. For example, it helped unravel the "stereotypical mammies, matriarchs,

[127] Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 70.
[128] Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 70.
[129] Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 70.

welfare recipients, and hot mommas" that Black Feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins reminds us justified oppression of Black women. But if the images of strong and kick ass Black men and women remain dehistoricized from this moment, they become easily understood only as part of a legacy to justify new ways of oppressing Black people. And thus, we are now left to contend with the competing legacies of Black martial artistry's circulation. There is empowerment in the 21st century for marginalized folks to see Black martial arts representation, especially in light of the multiple waves of hate crime spikes of the 2010s. But there is also the danger of uncritically reifying Black as overly defensive and powerful in the Era of the Movement for Black Lives. These are issues that I continue to explore in the Epilogue.

EPILOGUE

As the Black Power Era waned, organizers' tactics, rhetoric, and modes of expression became absorbed into Black cultural politics, never completely disappearing. Black martial artistry maintained a relationship with community organizing. For many instructors, that meant teaching implicitly and explicitly Black nationalist ideas of Black liberation through embodied knowledge and community engagement. Martial arts instructors sustained the goals of the 1960s and 1970s far beyond the movement. The Panther's Steve McCutchen and CAP's Maasi joined pioneering martial arts instructors like Moses Powell, Ron Van Clief, and countless others, by teaching well into the 1980s, 1990s, and the 2000s. Artists drew Black martial artists into the new millennium as well. This epilogue illuminates the legacies of Black Power martial artistry while exploring its revitalized depictions in the contemporary moment. Not only have Black practitioners endured, but their likenesses remain shorthand for those who write stories using a particular genealogy of Black expressiveness. I reflect upon this phenomenon in contemporary creations like the television show *Steven Universe* and the film *Black Panther*. They tell new, more expansive stories about Black unarmed self-defense and gender formation while harkening to the mid to late 20th century. Afterward, I conclude "Built with Our Empty Fists" by distilling takeaways from martial arts within the Black Freedom Movement and allude to the stories of unarmed self-defense that have yet to be told.

I. From Cleo to Garnet: How Empowerment and Queer, Radical Black Women's Martial Artistry has begun anew in the 21st century

As Blaxploitation declined, the image of the Black Power martial artist survived. In ways perhaps that Black men's martial arts representation did or could not, films starring women like *Cleopatra Jones*, opens space for many reimaginings of gender identity empowerment. Its female iteration found salience in 21st century Blaxploitation homages and Black characters such as Lana from the FX television show *Archer*, Kamau Kogo from the Image Comic's series, *Bitch Planet*, and Garnet from *Steven Universe*. I analyze Garnet in this section because Garnet is the clearest, on-screen depiction from the 21st century that centers a Black woman's martial arts skills. I compare her to Cleopatra Jones, even in light of homophobia, because Garnet fulfills the queer gestures that can be read onto Cleopatra Jones in the sequel, *Casino of Gold*. Overall, I contend that Garnet's fights for justice call for a resurgence of the gender politics of Blaxploitation women who used their martial arts skills to weed out corruption. Though the rest of this dissertation ends in the 1980s, this brief analysis of 2010s popular culture allows us to think about what is possible in the recirculation and updating of Blaxploitation images. Furthermore, it allows us to understand how Blaxploitation's tropes permanently reshaped notions of Black gender in popular culture.

Steven Universe is a youth show that began airing on the cable network channel, Cartoon Network, in 2013. It tells the story of "crystal gems." They are a part of a mystical, alien race of women and gender nonbinary beings who use super-powered weapons to defeat evil monsters and fellow gems. The show's heroes are distinct from other gems because they rebelled against the colonization and imperial oppression that their race tried to impose upon Earth. In the process of continuing to protect Earth, they create a nontraditional, non-normative family structure for

the youngest gem named Steven, who is half-human. He lives with three, older gems who serve as his main guardians even though his father lives close by, is actively involved in his life, and has an excellent relationship with his co-parents.

Aptly named, Pearl is the whitest of the crystal gems and the most "femme" presenting. She is stereotypically uptight and a stickler for process, procedure, and rules. She is a master swordsman. There is also Amethyst, who arguably depicts an ambiguous woman of color, who is brash, fun loving, and carefree. She wields a spiked lasso in order to save others. Then there is Garnet. As if descended from the 6'2'' Tamara Dobson, Garnet towers over the other crystal gems. Her skin is a marvelous combination of vivid black and red colors. Atop her tall frame is a large afro, well-picked because it is perfectly and cartoonishly square. An inheritor of Black Power interpretations of "the cool," Garnet dons Black Panther-esque sunglasses. She signals to opponents an unassailable Blackness. She stands as the leader of the gems because of her overwhelming strength and her fighting skills differentiate her. She pulls out no sword, no lasso. When the "fight is on," she draws out her red-Black fists. Doubling them in size, she squashes opponents with her enlarged hands and a funk and a flow reminiscent of Blaxploitation heroes.

As season one progresses, Garnet reveals she is a "fusion" gem. A fusion happens when two gems perform a queer act of lovemaking, an intertwining of their bodies caused by mutual love, respect, and bravery. It is because she is a fusion of smaller women of color that Garnet is so powerful. She is made of the loving energy of two, radical women of color protectors. She is as if the Third World Women's Alliance had superpowers. She is, as she tells Steven, "an experience," and her characterization holds the tension of Black women's bodies as excessive and alluring.[1]

[1] The author is indebted to a conversation with Dr. Leigh Raiford for the development of this reading.

In the episode "Garnet's Universe," we learn explicitly that Garnet is carrying on the legacy of Black power martial artistry in the era of the Movement for Black Lives. Steven theorizes what his queer, Black parent does with her free time. He imagines that her days are filled with martial arts training. Early in the episode, one of her training partners, a mystical rabbit samurai, launches a sneaky aerial attack against Garnet to test her reflexes. Garnet uses her Black Power fists to catch his sword before it cuts through her head. Garnet's nemesis for the episode is a large fox god who has supposedly stolen a powerful gem from a Shinto shrine. Initially, he makes easy work of Garnet, so she has to reorganize.

What ensues is a beautiful training scene reminiscent of *Super Fly*. With her training partners, she sits under a waterfall, mediating and honing her mental and spiritual dexterity like Black revolutionaries who believed martial arts strengthened their spirits and overcame "mental colonization." When she leaves the waterfall, Garnet sits in a horse stance that is deeper than the one used by Cleopatra Jones. As her training partners watch, Garnet focuses her empty hands until they become supersized gauntlets, five times larger than her regular empty hands. She rapidly throws punches into the air like she is in karate class. After her punch sequence, it is revealed that her power has reached unparalleled levels. It surpasses level ten thousand reaching a point where quantifying power no longer has a numerical equivalent. All her friends can say is "sooooo cooool."[2] As Garnet defeats the fox god and white thief, her friends awe at her like the Johnson Brothers awed Cleo's soul sister power.

As a radical queer woman created from love, it is revealed that Garnet's strength does not come from "how many mountains [she] can punch in half."[3] It comes from loving her chosen

[2] *Steven Universe*, episode 33, "Garnet's Universe," directed by Ian Jones-Quartey, written by Rebecca Sugar, featuring Estelle, Zach Callison, Michaela Dietz, and Deedee Magno, aired November 13, 2014, on Cartoon Network, https://www.hulu.com/series/steven-universe-73e1e605-f760-470c-9a58-0148abe73270.
[3] *Steven Universe*, episode 33, "Garnet's Universe," directed by Ian Jones-Quartey.

son, Steven. Several episodes later, the first season finale ends with a display of Garnet's Third World Queer womanhood, love, and martial arts skills. She must vanquish Jasper, an evil gem who exhibits toxic masculinity and wants to take over and rule Earth. She implores her foe, who wants to impose imperial rule on Earth, to fight her one on one without weapons. As she jump-kicks her way to victory, Garnet, who is voiced by Afro British singer Estelle, sings: "I am a feeling and I will never end. Try to hit me if you're able. Can't you see my relationship is stable? I am their fury. I am their patience. I am a conversation. I am made of love and its stronger than you."[4] And indeed, the fury of her high-flying strikes demonstrate such. The fury of her high-flying side and fronts kicks perform her words.

Garnet's representation is not without its flaws. Steven Universe is written by a white, albeit bisexual, non-binary woman writer, Rebecca Sugar.[5] Like Cleopatra Jones and other Blaxploitation heroines, she is overly sexualized. She has thick hips and frequently places her hands on them. She is the only character with drawn lips, which mark her with stereotypical features racialized as Black. And when she becomes a triple fusion with one of the other gems, Amethyst, who has been speculated to be either Latinx or Asian American, Garnets becomes a feral looking gem called Sugelite. Sugelite is represented as unstable, overzealous, and "too much," a warning that combining the energies of too many women of color may be dangerous, especially without the calm logic of white women, symbolized by the crystal gem Pearl. And even by herself, Garnet's awe-inspiring power is often seen as excessive, in line with views that the Black woman's body is itself always in excess. For example, when the family goes to a beach, Garnet is the only one told to "be gentle" during a volleyball game. To which, Garnet can

[4] *Steven Universe*, episode 53, "Jail Break," directed by Ian Jones-Quartey, written by Rebecca Sugar, featuring Estelle, Zach Callison, Michaela Dietz, and Deedee Magno, aired November 13, 2014, on Cartoon Network, https://www.hulu.com/series/steven-universe-73e1e605-f760-470c-9a58-0148abe73270.
[5] Her characterization is directed in the show by Ghanaian-American, Ian Jones-Quartey.

only respond, "I'll try."[6] Carrying on the legacy of the unstoppable, omnipotent Blaxploitation heroine has its consequences. Dangerous, superwoman strength has been stereotyped over the years to the detriment of Black women's safety as highlighted for the contemporary Movement for Black lives. This calls to mind how Black women continue to be seen as angry, aggressive, dangerous, and subjectable to police brutality and premature death, as indicated by the #SayHerName Brief from the African American Policy Forum as well as legal scholar Andrea Ritchie's *Invisible No More: Police Violence Against Black Women and Women of Color*. Consequentially, we should be critical and aware of how the image of dangerous, kick-ass, Black female martial artists helped produced ugly and deadly legacies for Black women's lives and representations.

Holding this tension, I still see Garnet as the fulfillment of the desire to queer to the 1970s Black woman action hero. As mentioned in Chapter 4, this is a move taken by Jennifer Brody when she suggests that Black queer audiences can disidentify with Cleo. We have to read against the grain for queerness in the *Cleopatra Jones* films, yet for *Steven Universe*, we are meant to believe Garnet's liberation politics of love and community defense are decidedly queer. Her existence demonstrates the potential for a queer, radical, warrior future for nonbinary folx and women. And her depiction, while not inherently revolutionary, still disrupts the "visual rhetoric/rationale" to which we are accustomed.[7] It also very much furthers a long history of women in the 1970s and 1980s who deployed martial arts imagery and "training scenes" to showcase their developments as warriors and survivors of life, as Maxine Hong Kingston did in her 1976 book, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*.

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[6] *Steven Universe*, episode 18, "Beach Party," directed by Ian Jones-Quartey, written by Rebecca Sugar, featuring Estelle, Zach Callison, Michaela Dietz, and Deedee Magno, aired 30, 2014, on Cartoon Network, https://www.hulu.com/series/steven-universe-73e1e605-f760-470c-9a58-0148abe73270.

[7] Mary Schmidt Campbell, "Terms of the Debater: The Battle for the Black Body, 19th Century to the Present," (keynote lecture, Black Portraiture[s] IV Conference: The Color of Silence, Harvard University, Boston, MA, March 23, 2018).

21st century revivals or queerer renditions of Black martial artists can be found in more popular culture sources than *Steven Universe.* Kamau Kogo from Image Comics' 2014-2017 *Bitch Planet* stands out. In Kelly Sue DeConnick's dystopic story, patriarchs control Earth in even more literal terms and send "non-compliant" women off-planet to be incarcerated. Kogo is an imprisoned woman who uses martial arts to survive the intergalactic prison that is housed on a separate planet. The first issue of the series ends with Kogo using assassin-level martial arts to defeat several misogynist prison guards. DeConnick was also heavily influenced by 1970s exploitation film as well as reading comics on military bases growing up.[8] There are also shows that mimic Blaxploitation tropes and to connect them to any present-day Black political culture. On the television show *Archer*, which began airing in 2009, Lana Kane is notable for being a hybrid of Foxy Brown's attitude while possessing Cleo's skills. She serves as a Cold War spy for a made-up U.S. government agency. Importantly, what connects all of these various takes is that, similar to many Blaxploitation films, the show runners and writers are white men and white women who, like Quentin Tarantino, help circulate these images of Black women.

This is not to say that Black content creators have been silent. Male and female representations circulate in Black written and directed 21st century texts. Notable examples include the women warriors known as the Dora Milaje, depicted in the resurgent the *Black Panther* comics and films. Also updating 1970s sexual and gender politics for new audiences, Haitian-American queer writer Roxanne Gay made two of these warriors into the cannon as

[8] For more on DeConnick, see Dayna Tortorici, "In the Feminist Sci-Fi of 'Bitch Planet,' Noncompliant Women Get Even," The Village Voice, December 27, 2016, https://www.villagevoice.com/2016/12/27/in-the-feminist-sci-fi-of-bitch-planet-noncompliant-women-get-even/; Lauren Davis, "Bitch Planet: The Feminist Exploitation Comic You Desperately Need," IO9, Gizmodo, December 30, 2014, https://io9.gizmodo.com/bitch-planet-the-feminist-exploitation-webcomic-you-de-1676515865; and Marissa Stotter, dir. *She Makes Comics* (2014; Los Angeles, CA: XLrator Media, 2017).

lovers in the 2017 series: *Black Panther: World of Wakanda*. The series became the first Marvel series to be written by a Black woman.[9]

21st century renewals of the *Black Panther* universe culminated in 2018 when Marvel released the first film starring Chadwick Boseman as the titular hero. *Black Panther* dazzled audiences with its performances of African Diasporic and Asian combat skills. But it incoherently represented Black Power politics. Its villain, a military veteran and expert fighter, almost forges a Black empire to retaliate against global white supremacy. The film suggests that his vision of Black revolution comes from his experience growing up in Oakland, shaped by a father who believed in the Black Panther Party. But in doing so, the movie suggests a connection between the BPP and its practices of self-defense and Black imperialism. Ironically, Chadwick Boseman's real-life experiences correct what writer and director Ryan Coogler misconstrued about Black Power, self-defense, and empire. Boseman trained with instructor Marrese Crump because, like CAP activists, he wanted audiences to know that martial arts had roots in Africa as well as Asia.[10] His work with Crump boosted the martial arts Boseman learned years before from Brooklyn's Bill McCloud. McCloud started Shotokan karate and jujitsu in 1967, and his teachers included none other than the Nation of Islam's Moses Powell and Powell's Filipino instructor, Florendo Visitacion.[11] Thus, forty-six years after the release of *Enter the Dragon*, the legacies of Black Power and U.S. militarism hid in plain sight once again.

[9] She does this alongside Yona Harvey and under the direction of Ta-Nehisi Coates' larger series, *Black Panther*.
[10] "ET Interview Chadwick Boseman Martial Arts Training," from interview by *Entertainment Tonight* with Chadwick Boseman and Danai Gurira, accessed May 4, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33eQC56wr-Y.
[11] See Brad Curran, "Training the Black Panther-Interview with Marrese Crump, Interviews, Kung-fu Kingdom, February 9, 2018, https://kungfukingdom.com/training-the-black-panther-interview-with-marrese-crump/ and "Grand Master Bill McCloud," MAUSA Health and Fitness Center, accessed May 4, 2020, www.studymartialarts.com/instructors/grand-master-bill-mccloud/. For more on Powell and Visitacion, refer to the Introduction.

Though the complicated roots of Black martial artistry persisted unseen, fresh interpretations continued too, from a source known for her knees of steel and fast-twitch leg muscles. A successful Houston rapper, twerker, and social media influencer, Megan Thee Stallion reminded audiences the myriad of ways that martial arts are empowering for Black women themselves. All the artwork for her 2019 mixtape *Fever* deployed 1970s Blaxploitation imagery for its meaning-making. Noticeably in the music video for her song, "Realer," Stallion and director Munachi Osegbu recreated the popping colors and visuals of the Foxy Brown opening credits. In an interview with *Surface* Magazine, Osegbu, a queer, Nigerian-American, said

> I envisioned it as basically a trailer for a blaxploitation film in 1971. Like early '70s, kind of funky tribute to those like Pam Grier and Foxy Brown, because they actually are super important for black people in entertainment, cinema, and art. I felt really honored to make a project that referenced that period. Because last year, when I was still in college, I wrote an entire thesis paper on blaxploitation, so it was amazing to be able to [apply it in my work].[12]

Not only do the colors and flashing dancers remind us of the 1970s, but the incorporation of martial artistry as well. In the middle of Osegbu's video, quick yet vibrant scenes showcase Megan Thee Stallion and her dancers punctuating the air and the musical beat with guns, heels, and kicking feet.

[12] Lainey R. Sidell, "Unpacking Megan Thee Stallion's Internet-Breaking Music Videos with the Director Behind Them," *Surface*, June 9, 2019, https://www.surfacemag.com/articles/megan-thee-stallion-realer-fever-munachi-osegbu-director/.

II. Conclusion

In this dissertation, I have sought to explore several themes. The Introduction established how the exposure of African Americans to Asian-descended martial arts through Cold War imperialism existed within a larger world of American martial artistry. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 pondered what caused community organizers to practice martial arts as a part of their social movement strategies. These chapters assessed the overlap between martial artistry and both more "conservative" and more "revolutionary" views on racial uplift, political mobilization, gender, and Black liberation. They also demonstrated that women were not absent from martial arts practice. I discussed how the shared belief in martial artistry as a tool of practical, immediate, and long-term liberation made it a part of redefining Black manhood and womanhood among organizers. The final chapter interrogated why we improperly historicize the presence of the Black Power martial artist in popular culture. Lastly, in the Epilogue, I explored how the image of the Black Power martial artist still circulates.

I end *Built with Empty Fists* with my final thoughts on issues raised by its examinations. First, this story must be discussed carefully. It is not simply a history of resistance, especially because of the connection to U.S militarization. Interethnic encounters in the Pacific and the U.S. helped incorporate martial arts instruction into Black American traditions of institution building and community development. It is inconvenient for the recovery project of early Afro Asian Studies that orientalism and occupation played such a large role in bringing martial arts classes to the mainstream U.S. In Joseph Svinth's apolitical words, "Ironically, the improved training [of the early twentieth century…] led to criminals, nationalists, union organizers, and revolutionaries providing better training to their own forces."[13] My conviction remains as clear as when I began

[13] Joseph Svinth, "Military, Paramilitary, and the Law Enforcement Methods," in *Martial Arts of the World: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, ed. Thomas A. Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2010), 636.

writing: even as scholars romanticize the partnerships of Black and Asian peoples, they must understand what it means for solidarity and intimacy to be born from militarism and cultural imperialism. The history of Black Power and martial artistry is not just the Third World solidarity envisioned in films. Nor is it just the practical or aesthetic practices of the Nation of Islam, the Congress of African People, or the Black Panther Party. Martial arts practice is an example of what happens when you learn a practice while in transit, as a cog of empire, and then teach that practice to help undo state oppression as well as mental and physical harm. Rightfully, Vijay Prashad wanted us to comprehend what would happen if we deemphasized the similarities among different ethnicities and forgot the "search for cultural roots of solidarity not…dependent on…biology."[14] But, "polycultural" analyses can elide the role U.S. imperialism has played in transpacific and transatlantic exchanges of activist tactics.[15]

The accurate narrative of Black Power martial arts necessarily alters the assumed relationships between radical Black practices and American empire. By and large, Americans and African Americans did not learn martial arts just because Asians and Asian Americans became increasingly willing to teach them. This distinction is important to comprehend precisely because martial arts practice is still orientalized and otherized in the United States. As long as American martial artists are considered clichéd by-products of Asian interaction with U.S. society, the legacy of empire is still hiding behind the scenes. This does not mean organizers should have abandoned studying martial arts as a strategy. Martial arts were too important for the confidence and self-defense of activists and marginalized peoples, regardless of political affiliation.

[14] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity*, Boston: Beacon Press, 2001, 148.
[15] Vijay Prashad, *Everybody Was Kung Fu Fighting*, 56.

But there are lessons to be learned from uncritically adopting karate and taekwondo and forgetting their entanglement with white military nationalism and the colonial state. The role of the military as both an ideological and repressive state apparatus complicates the racialization and solidarity of people of color inside and outside of U.S. border.[16] Within the dissemination and rational for teaching martial arts hides another space for us to critique the U.S. military's racialized, sexualized, gendered violence as narrated by scholars like Victor Mendoza, Chandan Reddy, and Jasbir Puar. Critiques of the U.S. military's imperialist violence should not be taken lightly. Taking it more seriously as an active apparatus, with its own goals, gives us new windows into the logic of the U.S.'s empire.

A tension between militarization and resistance exists within my subject's choices as well as my methodology. Often organizations practiced hand-to-hand combat in ways that mirrored the law enforcement agencies that alienated them. My role as a scholar has been to analyze their replication of imperialist states as well as American iterations of Victorian manhood. Consequently, I wondered about the politics of studying and critiquing people who were already so thoroughly studied and hyper-surveilled. However, I also acknowledged that it would be essential to grapple ideologically with strategies of empowerment.

Women of Color Feminism and Queer of Color Critique theorists like the Combahee River Collective and Roderick Ferguson task us with thinking about how activists can avoid uncritically adopting the formulations of the white nationalist, heteropatriarchal nation-state. In the anthology 1981's *This Bridge Called My Back*, several authors deal with the subject. In their essays "Revolution: It's Not Neat or Pretty or Quick" and "We are All in the Same Boat," Pat Parker and Rosario Morales respectively wrote about how imperialism impedes revolution,

[16] For more on ideological and repressive state apparatuses, see Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in the Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism, ed. Jeffrey J. Williams, etc. all. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018).

noting that its masculinist oppressions are often repeated in people of color's nationalisms.[17] Cheryl Clarke corroborates the idea in "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance." For her, imposed, Eurocentric, heterosexuality always implied the presence of empire. While she deployed imperialism in a variety of ways that fail to define the term, she harkened to an unassailable relationship between "counter-revolutionary, Western heterosexuality" and Black male supremacy. For Clarke, Black male supremacy, inflected with traces of adopted, imperial patriarchy, is central to post-Emancipation gender oppression and sexual politics that shaped Black women and men's realities.[18]

As such, though I wrote of its emancipatory power, Black Power martial arts could not escape the pitfalls that endangered other forms of organizing. Black men fought each other to determine whose security training should provide protection for a community or organization of organizers.[19] Stories of interpersonal abuse include the Nation of Islam punishing its members physically, and Steve McCutchen regretfully striking one of his fellow Panthers, for which he was brutally beaten in return.[20] And as has been pointed out in the case studies, the beautiful ideals of care and safety that martial artists believed could not eliminate sexualized and gendered violence. These moments of physical harm cannot and should not be neatly correlated to the study of martial arts. Yet I find it even more dangerous not to locate them within larger critiques about how heterosexual hypermasculinity, nationalist authority, and patriarchal violence occurred within Black organizers' interactions with each other.

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[17] See *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* 4th edition, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015).
[18] Cheryl Clarke, "Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* 4th edition, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015), 129.
[19] Komozi Woodard, in person conversation with author, 2014.
[20] Steve McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While*, 163-166. Intra-community abuse among activists is corroborated by other organizers. Henry Taylor, a Black labor organizer in Ohio and New York in the 1970s, studied martial arts to protect himself from other activists who made him feel physically threatened and unsafe. Henry Taylor in discussion with the author, January 2018.

For this interdisciplinary history, questions about method and theoretical framework inevitably produced reflections on the archive. The research I conducted for *Built with Empty Fists* reifies the need for tackling questions in African American studies through a transnational lens. It is a project unto itself to research at archives in places like Okinawa or to conduct interviews with Asian instructors or students who trained alongside Americans. This would answer many questions about how shared martial arts classes affected populations under imperialism, which undoubtedly changed the culture of martial arts spaces worldwide. There were many complicated relationships between occupiers and local peoples. American studies scholar Christina Klein reminds us that empire produces types of intimacies that are not as directly violent as others. The bonds with veterans and some of their Asian instructors were familial. Americans often sought permission or were bestowed permission to spread their masters' arts. Some who were rejected broke ties with instructors they considered father figures, in order to further spread the arts.[21] *Built with Our Empty Fists* touches briefly upon many of these complications using American sources that have an international scope. It reveals that dynamic and complex human relationships lie behind the spread of Asian martial artistry. The full thoughts and feelings and legacies of these intimacies and relationships cannot be known unless scholars continue to prioritize the transpacific archive.

No matter how we write or research the many histories of Asian-descended martial arts, it will contain contractions. Jared Miracle lets us chew on this in his work. He writes:

[21] See Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism Asia in the Middlebrow* Imagination, 1945-1961, Berkeley (University of California Press, 2003). It is also helpful to note Christina Klein's arguments about the Cold War. She urges the field to consider how U.S. empire is not only negotiated through hyper masculine, military expansion, but also negotiated through "maternal, adoptive, and familial terms." See 18. In the 20th century, musical productions, as written by allies to Asian integration, worked as "sentimental pathways" that worked alongside "material pathways" to ensure the spread of American military, political, and socioeconomic influence in non-Communist Asia. See 17. Klein's work, coupled with Jodi Kim's work, pushes the field of U.S. empire studies to use Asian American studies to reshape the multiple, contradictory racial projects of the Cold War and how they advanced the U.S.'s territorial, economic, and cultural gains.

> Unlike Japan, where fighting arts were mandatory for young men, and China, where they were standardized and endorsed by governments,…the Western world viewed the fighting disciplines as recreational entertainment. This would become to factor strongly into their interpretations of the Asian martial arts. The succeeding generations of Western martial arts consumers took the recreational attitude to heart, creating a cultural space in which dichotomous messages not only cohabitated, but somehow became mutually reliant... On one hand, the martial arts are engaged in for discipline and follow a militaristic mindset. On the other, they are the stuff of recreation and children's television.[22]

Asian-descended martial arts dualities persisted during the 20th century, at once orientalizing and Americanizing martial arts for the first time. But again, these strands of thought are difficult to trace just from an archive driven by American perspectives. This dissertation proves that American martial arts studies requires historically grounded and rigorous knowledge of the African Diaspora, the Third World, the Black Pacific, and more.

My concluding thoughts extends to how examining the role of martial arts within the Black Power Era leads to news ways of comprehending the breadth of Black activism. Martial arts instruction forces us to assess how certain organizing activities push the temporal boundaries of Black Power past the declension narrative that the movement ended in 1975. It also pushes us to reexamine the multifacetedness of Black Power ideology and practice. Martial artistry deepens our understanding of Black Power expressive culture, self-defense, gender norms, and independent education. It changes how we understand the practice and trajectory of self-defense

[22] Jared Miracle, *Now with Kung Fu Grip! How Bodybuilders, Soldiers and a Hairdresser Reinvented Martial Arts for America* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2016), 74.

within Black political organizing. It strengthens our understanding of the meticulous curriculums developed by Black independent schools. At its core, studying martial arts history proves that Black Power activism combined political and economic self-determination with physical and spiritual well-being and health in Black communities.

Talking about the martial arts as cultural formations changes where we look for the Black Arts Movement's legacies and reconceptualizes how we see "artistic production." As detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, Black artists took painstaking steps to theorize and describe the precision and technicality behind their movements. Their movements on the ground and through the air were captured by muscle memory as well as aesthetically sharp images in visual culture. By locating practitioners and martial arts cartoonists and photographers in a Black aesthetic tradition, *Built with Our Empty Fists* permanently upends traditional qualifications for what constitutes "art." It stresses how, by choosing new objects of analysis, scholars push the theoretical boundaries of who was and currently is a "Black artist."

Black organizers did not believe martial arts were purely for self-defense within military culture. Martial arts cultures across the globe often grew out of societies' needs to develop skills in combat. But concentrating on this invisibilizes artists like CAP's Mfundishi Maasi and Jim Dyson and prevents a holistic understanding of martial artistry. I agree with Thomas Green and his conclusions in the 2003 article, "Freeing the Afrikan Mind: The Role of Martial Arts in Contemporary African American Cultural Nationalism." A Martial Arts studies scholar and Anthropologist, Green argued that martial arts practice intertwines seamlessly with Black "cultural nationalism" and Pan-Africanism and is a "vital element in the liberation of African

American consciousness."[23] I see martial artistry as its own set of cultural practices. Beyond strikes and blocks, there is a philosophy that "provides the why...provides the what" of unarmed self."[24] Even if it is difficult to quantify the impact or reach of Black Power instructors, they created a space for martial arts and personal growth to be included in the community development praxis of community organizers. As Mfundishi Maasi said, the philosophical, cultural, and personal development of martial arts "emphasize[d] the elements required to build strong viable communities." [25]

"Built with Our Empty Fists" overcomes the tendencies to write off Black martial artists as chauvinists. We cannot afford to assume women were absent from martial artistry and we must not presume we understand how spaces became gendered. This approach denies the rationale and stories of women in the Nation, for example. Scholarship can no longer ignore Black women such as the Panther's tournament champions nor minimize Black women's performances, such as Gloria Hendry's Sydney from *Black Belt Jones*. Fred Ho wrote explicitly that "the black female presence in martial arts is still negligible," making a false claim about their participation in the 20th century and now.[26] Sweeping assumptions about Blackness, martial arts, and gender form an inaccurate narrative and prevent us from looking for Black women in places they did appear. Resurfacing Black women martial artists, their images, and their on-screen representations disrupts what we understand about gender roles and disrupts the notion that only men prepared for community protection. More than I can convey in a single work whose sources

[23] See Thomas Green, "Freeing the Afrikan Mind: The Role of Martial Arts in Contemporary African American Cultural Nationalism," in *Martial Arts in the Modern World*, ed. Thomas A Green and Joseph R. Svinth (Westport: Praeger, 2003).and Thomas Green, "Afrikan Martial Arts," in *Martial Arts of the World [2 volumes]: An Encyclopedia of History and Innovation*, ed. Thomas Green and Joseph Svinth. Vol. 2 (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010).
[24] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014.
[25] Mfundishi Maasi, email message to author, October 13, 2014.
[26] Fred Ho, "Kickin' the White Man's Ass: Black Power, Aesthetics, and the Asian Marital Arts," in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York University, 2006), 309.

are from 1950s to the 1970s, Black women were a part of martial artistry and unarmed self-defense, just as they had been part of learning armed self-defense. As a historian, I know that in looking at the origin stories of Black martial artistry, as with many practices and public spaces, gives an inherent gendered nature to the study. Nevertheless, as time progressed, Black women participated in larger numbers, many drawn into practicing by the women's movement and the movement for self-defense of the 1970s and 1980s. And if they were not students of self-defense, they were still active in deciding who should perform community protection.

There is much still to be said about Black women's thoughts on martial arts in the future. Angela Davis mentioned practicing martial arts in 1971. The movements kept her mentally and spiritually present under the harsh conditions of prison life.[27] Elaine Brown noted in her biography the attractiveness and dangerousness of Panther men with martial arts muscles.[28] OCS director Ericka Huggins used her authority to allow children's martial arts to flourish. She also implored Chairwoman Elaine Brown to cancel adult classes when they deteriorated into participants thrashing one another.[29] Lastly, writers for *Unity and Struggle*, mostly likely Black women, penned 1976 article, "From Congress of Afrikan People to Revolutionary Communist League (M-L-M)."[30] It stated that:

> the BCD attempted to combine the surface images of Karenga's US organization with a small merchant outlook and martial arts "philosophy." A characteristic of one sector of cultural nationalism was the view of karate and the martial arts as a key element in the

[27] Angela Davis, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1974), 64.
[28] Elaine Brown, *A Taste of Power*: *A Black Woman's Story* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 194 and 290.
[29] Steve McCutchen, *We Were Free for a While: Back to Back in the Black Panther Party* (Maryland: PublishAmerica, 2008), 169-172. McCutchen did not agree with Huggins' assessment. His goal for the classes was to give members a space to "let off some of their pent-up furies in a training arena…to allow an outlet and to provide training." He also believed the classes let members "experience some hand to hand combat" and become exposed new skills.
[30] Janée Moses, in message to author, 2019. Even though the authors are unnamed, Moses notes that this period was one were women writing a large portion of articles for Unity and Struggle. The message and its implicit gender critique also suggest that women, who had transitioned from CAP into the leftist Revolutionary Communist League, likely wrote or co-wrote the article.

Black revolution. The BCD promoted a metaphysical image of the "Black revolutionary" as one who simply wore African clothes and could "fight" by being a karate expert.[31] This revisionist CFUN/CAP history scoffed that martial arts practice performed the most superficial understanding of cultural nationalist thought. Thus, involved or not, women's memories unequivocally enrich what we know. Women's involvement in martial arts argues for the importance of martial arts to girlhoods and womanhood and demonstrates that intentional space building and pedagogy could be gender inclusive during Black Power. But women's critiques of martial arts also urge us to further scrutinize the era's ideologies, practices, and masculinities.

Thus, my takeaways for the relationship of martial arts and gender are multifold. Both Black practices of manhood and womanhood changed with the increased practice of unarmed self-defense and martial artistry. As previous scholars overemphasized, Black manhood found a new type of jubilance through the practicality and health benefits of martial artistry, the defiance of autonomous movement, and the ability to embody the very idea of protection for self and community. *Built with Our Empty Fists* acknowledges what few texts have: that the same reasons that empowered Black men to study martial arts also empowered women. And as with other facets of Black Power, women are crucial to understanding the movement. Black women's agency and political power in the United States have always been powerful yet fraught. The gender politics of the Black Power movement were robust and at times progressive, reflecting and challenging gender dynamics already existent in Black communities.

In conclusion, there is no singular Black martial arts origin story. Bruce Lee films influenced a boom in practice alongside countless other kung fu films, transnational Asian

[31] "From Congress of Afrikan People to Revolutionary Communist League (M-L-M)," *Unity and Struggle*, June 1976

migration, and instruction not related to U.S. military intervention. There is also no singular story of the motivation, purpose, or "why" of Black martial artistry. I maintain that martial arts defy and break categorization. Such an existence fits within a Black Power project because Black Power too defies categorization. In my analyses, I disaggregate the different ways martial arts can be used (unarmed self-defense, combat sport, health practice, etc.). Yet martial arts were always all of these formations at once, continuously hybrid and heterogeneous. None of the Black Power case studies were more "Black Power-like" than the others. The overlaps between needs in the Nation of Islam, the Congress of African People, and the Black Panther Party point to a movement for martial arts.

I urge scholars to neither dismiss Black martial artistry as cultural appropriation nor dismiss the history of imperialism implicated in its practice. Doing martial arts kept people sane, kept people safe, and prepared them for political struggles ahead. Those struggles included things understudied in this dissertation, such as organizing by Nation of Islam members imprisoned in Attica as well as labor organizing by groups like the International Black Workers Congress.[32] The narratives of such prison and labor organizing will need to be told. So too will more stories of Black women who fought law enforcement approaches to gender violence and figured martial arts classes within a holistic movement for social, legal, and personal change.[33] With more testimonies and evidence will come more clarity, more punches, and more kicks. And

[32] Archives at the New York State Archives hold images of judo techniques confiscated from Nation of Islam members at the Prison. The author is indebted to Dr. Garrett Felber for this information. For more on the International Black Workers Congress and its Manifesto that contains martial arts, see International Black Workers Congress, "DRAFT PROPOSAL: Manifesto of the International Black Workers Congress," Highland Park, Michigan, 1970, https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1/bwc-manifesto.htm. In their 1971 objectives they write, "Organize personal and community self-defense units. Training in the martial arts should increase and other forms of personal and community self-defense techniques." This connection to labor organizers and martial arts is made by Henry Taylor, in discussion with the author, in January 2018.

[33] For more, see Emily L. Thuma, *All Our Trials: Prisons, Policing, and the Feminist Fight to End Violence* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019). She writes on page 11: "By placing the criminalization of low-income, racialized women's self-defensive violence at the forefront of conversations about social movement strategy, it forced a reckoning with the contradictions of pursuing a crime-control approach to sexual violence under racial capitalism."

it is my hope that, in the middle of all the fists and fury, historians and readers alike will rethink: what is at stake in historicizing the rise and circulation of Black Power martial artistry?

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