JASON ROMISHER
Simon Fraser University

By Pen, Sword, and Struggle: African American High School Student Activism in Lawnside, New Jersey

When the black student body is no longer feared as a destructive monster and is understood as the potentially constructive body of concerned students that it is, better relations between the different races of the student population and better relations with the faculty and administration will begin to materialize
– Linda Waller, "*Right On!*," *The Scribe (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971, 2.*

On May 12, 1971, Haddon Heights High School (3HS), in the borough of Haddon Heights, New Jersey, erupted in bloody and dramatic racial violence. The incident was the culmination of six years of racial tensions at the school that finally reached the boiling point. Haddon Heights is a typical American white suburban middle-class town located in the South Jersey area near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. That it experienced racial tensions during the time of the civil rights/black power era is because even though Haddon Heights was and continues to be an almost entirely white community, it had a longstanding educational send/receive relationship with the nearby borough of Lawnside, one of at least ten self-governing African American towns in the United States.[1] Lawnside's autonomy insulated its inhabitants from many of the struggles and disruptions experienced by some African American communities during this time period. However, the absence of a high school in Lawnside created a dependency on a white community that exposed its youth to issues of racism and exclusionary treatment. African American students from Lawnside formed a significant minority of the student body at 3HS. Many of

[1] Geographer Harold M. Rose documented nine other African American towns with their incorporation date in parentheses: Brooklynn, IL. (1874), Mound Bayou, MS. (1898), Robbins, IL. (1917), Fairmount Heights, MD. (1927), Glenarden, MD. (1939), Lincoln Heights, OH. (1946), Urbancrest, OH. (1947), Kinloch, MO. (1948), and Grambling, LA. (1953). Harold M. Rose, "The All Negro Town: Its Evolution and Function," in *Black America: Geographic Perspectives*, edited by Robert T. Ernst and Lawrence Hugg (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1976), 354.

these young people participated in both non-violent and violent acts of protest and resistance in efforts to address grievances and improve how African American students were treated. They were also influenced by a locally developed youth organization named the Young Blacks of Lawnside who pursued an agenda of non-violence, community improvement, educational advancement, and peaceful activism. In this article, I will demonstrate two key determinations about African American high school student activism that stand out from the existing scholarship. Firstly, Lawnside's conservative community character coupled with the residential segregation of Haddon Heights afforded youth from Lawnside the space to engage in student activism that was not coopted by parent groups, community leaders, or African American political organizations. Secondly, this freedom resulted in female African American students seizing the dominant leadership positions in the Lawnside student cohort.[2]

Key events and organizational strategies associated with African American activism had different meanings, purposes, and parameters at different times and in different regions and locations. Historian Robert O. Self explains the difficulty many historians face in the attempt to interpret the civil rights/black power era in an extremely diverse American nation. He stated:

> What is needed is a framework that emphasizes the interplay of region, ideology, and strategy. It is clear that regional and local political economies with their own cultural, political, and structural constraints presented unique and specific versions of segregation and discrimination. The post-war civil rights movement emerged within these regional and local contexts across the country.[3]

As we will see, the black freedom struggle in Lawnside was shaped by regional political economies and specific local conditions. I also heed the call by historians Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang to view "Civil Rights and Black Power as successive waves of a broader BLM [black liberation movement], differentiated by strategy and tactics, organizations, leadership, membership, ideology, discourses,

[2] For more information about the history of Lawnside see Jason Romisher, "Youth Activism and the Black Freedom Struggle in Lawnside, New Jersey" (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2018).
[3] Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 332-333.

symbols and practices."[4] In this article, I will demonstrate how the black freedom struggle evolved and developed in one location that was influenced by specific regional and national trends including the campaigns for civil rights and the ideological turn to black power.[5]

Historians Thomas Sugrue, Walter David Greason, and Giles Wright all emphasize how New Jersey is a peculiar state that includes aspects of both northern and southern culture, customs, and attitudes.[6] Sugrue summarized New Jersey as follows:

> Scattered throughout the Garden State, particularly in its southern half - which appeared to observers to be Dixie's northern outpost, complete with scrubby truck farms and tumbledown shacks – were rural and small-town settlements, populated by the descendants of slaves and agricultural laborers. There New Jersey more closely resembled North Carolina than New York.[7]

Thus, Lawnside's historical development must be viewed in this context.

A comparative perspective on the Lawnside experience during the black freedom struggle is possible due to the examinations of African American high school student activism conducted in Maywood, Illinois by Jerome Skolnick, Philadelphia by Matthew Countryman, Los Angeles by Jeanne Theoharis, Boston by Tess Bundy, and Detroit by Dara Walker.[8] Students in these respective places either

---

[4] Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The "Long Movement" as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History* 92:2 (Spring, 2007): 275.

[5] I have chosen to use the phrase 'black freedom struggle' as opposed to Cha-Jua and Lang's 'black liberation movement' because it is much more commonly used in the historical literature of the civil rights and black power eras. Historian Clayborne Carson introduced the phrase 'black freedom struggle' in 1986.
Clayborne Carson, "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle," in *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, edited by Charles W. Eagles (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986).

[6] Giles R. Wright, *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, Department of State, 1988), 17; and Walter David Greason, *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013), 63.

[7] Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York, Random House, 2008), 176

[8] Jerome Skolnick Director, "The Politics of Protest: Violent Aspects of Protest & Confrontation: A Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence," 1969; Matthew Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Jeanne Theoharis, "W-A-L-K-O-U-T!": High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A.," in *Black Power at the Local Level*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph

received significant assistance from adults or had their grievances and concerns coopted by adult leaders, parents' groups, and African American organizations. In Maywood, parents and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) intervened after racial violence at a high school, and in Philadelphia and Los Angeles multiple African American organizations, parent groups and public figures became involved in high school reform initiatives.[9] The protests in Plainfield were parent-led and those in Boston were supported by adult-led African American organizations such as the Black United Front and the New Urban League. Walker's research in Detroit uncovered a rich group of passionate high school student activists that engaged in many instances of concerted social and political protest. Detroit's League of Revolutionary Black Workers initiated the organization of the city's high school students into a city-wide organization called the Black Student United Front (BSUF). The League worked with BSUF members to develop student leaders who engaged in significant activism in the city's schools. Neither of these case studies describe any significant African American female leadership in the respective student cohorts. As we will see, the experience in Lawnside was quite different in these two key respects.

The pattern where Lawnside students attend a predominately African American school up until the eighth grade before becoming a distinct minority in high school created psychological barriers for some Lawnside students. The impact

(New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Tess Bundy, "Black Student Power in Boston," African American Intellectual History Society, Online Forum on Student Activism, Jan. 9, 2018, https://www.aaihs.org/black-student-power-in-boston/; and Dara Walker, "Black Power and the Detroit High School Organizing Tradition," African American Intellectual History Society, Online Forum on Student Activism, Jan. 11, 2018, https://www.aaihs.org/black-power-and-the-detroit-high-school-organizing-tradition/.

[9] Skolnick, 123. During the late 1960s, the Black People's Unity Movement (BPUM) in Philadelphia helped stoke tremendous interest amongst African American youth about black nationalist ideas which included African practices and values, racial pride, and black history. The movement for educational reform in Philadelphia occurred in concert with the articulation of black power ideology in Philadelphia's African American organizations. Outside of BPUM, major leaders of the African American community in Philadelphia such as the city's NAACP President, Cecil B. Moore, were actively involved in the city's educational crisis. African American student activists in Los Angeles received significant support from African American organizations, parents, community leaders, and Chicano student activists. The 1967 school year at Los Angeles's Manual Arts High School did not begin with student activism but with a concerted educational campaign for change by organizations such as the NAACP, the Black Congress, and the United Parents Council. The campaign even attracted attention from national civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, James Forman, and James Farmer. See Countryman and Theoharis for more on the events in Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

of segregation in education was recognized in the 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* ruling which stated how segregation "generates a feeling of inferiority as to their [African Americans] status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."[10] Walter 'Butch' Gaines who graduated from 3HS in 1955 explained his mindset transitioning from the Lawnside Elementary School to 3HS. Gaines stated:

> I always had the impression that all white kids were smart. I don't know if that is something they [Lawnside Elders] instilled in me when I left Lawnside School for Haddon Heights. They would say, "When you go to Haddon Heights, you've got to do this and you got to do that and you're going to be around white kids." So I always had this impression that white kids were smart. And when I got down there, I said, "Shoot, these kids are dumber than I am." And not a whole lot of them were smarter than I was.[11]

Gaines' statement summarizes the inferiority complex that some Lawnside students may have internalized before arriving at 3HS. Lorraine Pollitt, who attended 3HS in the early 1970s, elaborated on the impression that Lawnside teachers had on the reception their graduates would receive at 3HS: "The teachers… instilled in us that when you leave here [Lawnside Elementary School] nobody's going to care about you at the next place, which was Haddon Heights. So when you go there, you do your best."[12] Some Lawnside teachers and elders therefore stressed to the community's children that they would not have caring teachers and would have to be absolutely perfect to achieve academic success when they transitioned to high school. This must have been quite a psychological burden for some.

[10] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of* Liberty, 182.
[11] David Dent, *In Search of Black America: Discovering the African-American Dream* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 70.
[12] Lorraine Pollitt, Interview by Dr. James Rada, Linda Shockley, Raymond Fussell, and C. Joyce Fowler, Aug. 10, 2006, "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.

Figure 1. The 1951 Lawnside Elementary School Grade 8 Graduating Class. Lawnside Historical Society, 2004 Pictorial Calendar.

The most notorious example of inequality which occurred at 3HS throughout its history was the long running practice of streaming African American students into general courses making them ineligible for college. Sugrue explains that this was a common practice in northern school districts. For example, Philadelphia school officials in the 1920s used intelligence tests to justify segregated education, and Chicago officials classified three-quarters of its southern-born African American students as 'retarded.'[13] Journalist David Dent, who interviewed several Lawnside residents for his book *In Search of Black America*, summarized 1940s graduate Ellen Benson's opinion about academic steering at 3HS as follows: "African Americans had to be well beyond above average to ward off the school's discouragement from taking college-track courses. Since [Benson] was near the top of her class, [she] didn't face as many raised eyebrows as other peers might have when she chose courses like chemistry." 'Butch' Gaines explained the incredulity that a 3HS guidance counselor inadvertently expressed when Gaines went off to

[13] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 171, 182.

college. The counselor phoned Gaines' house to ask if he was available to wash some windows. Gaines explained his mother's response: "My mother said 'No, sorry, he's not here, you know, he's in college.' It was like silence on the phone … she [the counselor] couldn't believe it."[14]

Linda Shockley, who finished sixth in the graduating class at 3HS in 1972 after achieving sterling academic results, stated that both her and other high achievers from Lawnside also faced and overcame academic steering.[15] Shockley related that when future State Senator Wayne Bryant wanted to take college preparatory classes he was denied entry. His father, I.R. Bryant, had to go to the school and inform the administration that he would select his son's classes, and not the school. Shockley alluded to the class barriers that may have prevented some Lawnside parents from confronting school authorities. She explained that I.R. Bryant was well-educated and worked for the I.R.S., whereas her mother "was a domestic… [who] cleaned other people's homes, but she knew [what] was important to me so she advocated for me." Shockley's mother phoned the Principal when 3HS elected to shut down an academic opportunity in conjunction with Rutgers University because she was the only student interested. The following is Shockley's account of the conversation:

> Shockley: Yeah, [Principal Bucher] said [the Rutgers Program is] not necessary then. And, my mother called there and said, "my daughter really wants to participate in this and she needs your approval" or whatever. And he said, "well, one monkey doesn't run the show."
>
> Interviewer: In those words?
>
> Shockley: That's what he said. And my mother said, "don't go anywhere because this monkey is coming up there."[16]

A female classmate of Shockley's from Lawnside credited her elementary teachers for "instill[ing] in us a sense of capability," while also lamenting the lack of support from the 3HS guidance staff. She recalls a guidance counselor directing her to look

[14] Dent, *Search* 61, 70.
[15] Linda Shockley's maiden name was Waller and it is under the name Linda Waller that she contributed to *The Scribe*.
[16] Linda Shockley, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 9, 2016.

for work and asking questions such as "why are you in here," and "why are you looking at those [college information] books."[17] Kenneth Macgregor, who began his teaching career at 3HS in 1959, became a Vice-Principal in the late 1960s, Principal in 1971, and later Superintendent answered "Yes" unequivocally when questioned whether academic steering took place at 3HS.[18]

The problem of equity in sport and extracurricular activities remained acute at 3HS well into the 1960s and 1970s. The first evidence of integration I found was on the swim team in 1957 and on the cheerleading squad was in 1961 although this did not represent a breakthrough in either regard, as the teams remained overwhelmingly white until the 1970s.[19] Gordon Higgs, the president of the Young Blacks of Lawnside and a 3HS graduate, explained the experience of African American athletes on the football team at 3HS in the mid-60s:

> I played on the football team and I was a good football player. We had five African Americans there and all five African Americans were the fastest on the team and I was the only one that played. I was a running back and in practice I couldn't be tackled. So they took me out of the running back position at 167 lbs and made me an offensive guard. And the community was outraged, I was outraged, but I hung in there and this was the vibration and the tone of what's happening at Haddon Heights. Last year I seen my assistant football coach and he fessed up. And he said that's just the way they were told to do things back then. He said, you were plenty fast, you had a good career ahead of you, and we had to do what we had to do. They were playing inferior players and they was losing the game. All five guys from Lawnside was qualified to start at 22 positions. And I was the only one who had a chance to play.

Higgs also related that his brother Reggie was used as a defensive specialist on the 3HS basketball team and was never passed the ball by his teammates. He described his brother as one of the best offensive players in the South Jersey area; he was able to score twenty-five points per game in organizational basketball.[20] Yearbook evidence does show African American athletes who exceled at 3HS in the 1950s and 1960s. For example, Al Coleburn was an All-Colonial Conference running back in 1959, and Bob Hardy was a Varsity football co-captain in 1961.[21] Nevertheless, a

[17] Anonymous Woman, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 2, 2016.
[18] Kenneth MacGregor, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 27, 2016.
[19] "The Garneteer," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1957 and 1961.
[20] Gordon Higgs, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 12, 2016.
[21] "The Garneteer," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1960 and 1962. Note: Football is a fall sport so the yearbook entries are staggered to the following calendar year.

Lawnside student who graduated from 3HS in the 1970s was cut from a Varsity team as a junior and then excelled as a senior on the team. Despite this success, his coach did not believe in him and did not assist in aiding his recruiting efforts. This student had to take the hard road by going to various junior colleges before earning a roster spot on the Varsity team at a Division One College program which led to a professional career.[22] The 3HS major male athletic teams have not achieved much success in terms of wins and losses in recent years. Higgs attributes this to a pattern of top Lawnside athletes going to Haddon Heights and having their prospects for athletic success take an errant turn. Higgs stated that "something always seems to go wrong when they get up there." As a result, parents have looked to other options for their athletically gifted children. A local parochial school, John Paul II in Haddonfield, has been a favoured destination and has actively recruited Lawnside athletes with athletic scholarships.[23]

Non-athletic extracurricular activities were open to African American students but on an unequal basis. 'Butch' Gaines explained his experience in the 1950s at 3HS: "After about a year's time we sort of got our feet on the ground and got involved in the many things they had for you to get involved in: the glee club, the choir and the band. You could be a reporter for the school paper, *The Scribe*, and then there was the sports."[24] Morris Smith, who graduated from 3HS in 1951, recounted that it was "unheard of" for African American students to participate in school dances during his time.[25] African American participation in school activities did occur from the 1920s to the 1960s in most activities, although majority white student participation was always the norm and there were significant exclusions from many school clubs, sports, and activities.

---

[22] This student travelled throughout the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a college athlete and recounted an example of discrimination at a Denny's restaurant in Utah. On two occasions this athlete and other African American teammates sat for extremely long periods of time before getting rude and dismissive service. In 1994, Denny's agreed to pay $54 million dollars to settle a class-action lawsuit "filed by thousands of black customers who had been refused service or had been forced to wait longer or pay more than white customers." Stephen Labaton, "Denny's Restaurants to Pay $54 Million in Race Based Suits," *The New York Times*, May 25, 1994.
[23] Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.
[24] Walter Gaines, Interview by Dr. James Rada and Shamele Jordan, Jun. 24, 2006, in "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.
[25] Morris Smith, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 26, 2016.

In 1954, the year of the *Brown v Board of Education* decision, African American students at 3HS participated on all freshmen athletic teams, the Glee Club, Choir, Yearbook staff, *Scribe* staff (including two editors), Band, the Prom, the Senior Trip, Quill and Scroll, International Relations Club, Assembly Club, and were Baton Twirlers. However, no African Americans were on student council, and none participated in the Junior or Senior Play. Amongst varsity teams for both boys and girls, only football and track had African American participation. A look beyond 1954 demonstrates that inequality in school activities remained pervasive until the late 1970s and 1980s. It was at this time that the first African American students became Prom Queen or King, Homecoming Queen, Student Council President, and chief editor of *The Scribe*.[26]

Disparate treatment of Lawnside students was facilitated by the failure of 3HS school officials to begin the diversification of its teaching staff until the 1960s and early 1970s. A 1963 State investigation into segregation in Camden County Schools indicated that 3HS first integrated its teaching staff in 1963, when an African American teacher was hired to instruct History and Spanish.[27] The existence of an all-white faculty at 3HS prior to 1963, and an overwhelmingly white staff thereafter, impacted the treatment of African American students. Ellen Benson explained her impression of the teaching faculty's treatment of Lawnside students during the 1940s: "When we got there, there was a, what do I want to say, racist attitudes in the faculty. And then there were others who welcomed the Lawnside students and wanted them to do well." Benson cited the example of a warning she received before entering 3HS to "watch out for this certain teacher cause she's going to ask about your background and tell you you came from Africa."[28] Linda Shockley explained that her sister recounted an incident where a teacher asked several students about their backgrounds: "She asked an Italian girl about her family history, then a Jewish child, before she got to a Lawnside girl and she said, you have

[26] "The Garnetter," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, Various Editions.
[27] *Camden and Environs*, *Civil Rights U.S.A.*, *Public Schools*, *Cities in the North and West*, a staff report submitted in 1963 by Albert P. Blaustein to The United States Commission on Civil Rights, 39. Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture.
[28] Ellen Jackson Benson, Interview by Dr. James Rada and Linda Shockley, Aug. 10, 2006, "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.

no history." Not all white faculty members engaged in such racially offensive behaviour. Shockley, like Benson, also recounted teachers at 3HS, such as English teacher Ms. Westermeier who spent her entire career at 3HS, who were very supportive towards, and did not discriminate against African American students.[29] I also interviewed several long-time 3HS teachers who had very progressive attitudes and were quite willing to speak to me about their political and racial views. That being said, the possibility exists that these teachers' sentiments reflect a 2016 mentality and may not fully capture the essence of their attitudes and conduct in the 1960s and 1970s.

3HS was also a typical American high school which ignored, minimized, and distorted African American history and culture in both curriculum and instruction. Sugrue relates that some critics believed that school instruction made African Americans the victims of cultural deprivation.[30] Lawnside students were exposed to some black history at their elementary school, but not at the formative high school level. The first time a 3HS teacher designed a course which addressed African American and Asian American studies was in 1968.[31] As we will see, incorporating African American studies into the curriculum at 3HS was a key objective for Lawnside student leaders.

During the 1963 government investigation into Camden County school segregation, Leonard B. Irwin, Haddon Heights School District Superintendent, argued that there were no problems concerning race-relations at 3HS. He praised the educational relationship between Haddon Heights and Lawnside, and stated that Lawnside students were "excellent members of the student body."[32] Thus, the 3HS school administrators at that time did not see the need to further diversify the teaching staff, address regimes of inequality, or explore how the curriculum could be revised to address the cultural needs of the entire student body. Perhaps, like many Americans, their attitudes were socially constructed to see racial inequality as natural and were thus caught off guard by African American student activism in the

[29] Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016.
[30] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 472.
[31] "Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship," *Courier Post*, May 14, 1969, 15.
[32] Blaustein, 40.

1960s. Within two years, Irwin's rosy picture of race-relations at 3HS would be torn asunder.

From 1965 to 1971, 3HS erupted in a series of violent episodes which culminated in the temporary closure of the school in 1971 because of a spontaneous eruption of racial violence. The first major incident of a fight on school grounds between white and African American students took place in September of 1965. Principal Gordon Bucher's reaction was to create an Interracial Council, which was designed ostensibly to facilitate dialogue and prevent future conflict.[33] Higgs was a member of the Council during the 1966-1967 school year. He stated that the Council functioned in name only, had no meetings, and was only active just in case something happened.[34] The next major incident occurred when black and white students engaged in a mass fist fight at a football pep rally in October of 1968.[35] This resulted in the decision by 3HS officials to mobilize and reorganize the Interracial Council. The Council now had twelve representatives with equal numbers of African American and white students, and held information and awareness sessions in fifteen different classrooms during the 1968-69 school year.[36]

In November and December 1968, Haddon Heights hosted two packed School Board meetings where white parents lobbed claims of assault against their children in 'gang attacks' by African American students.[37] There were no gangs in Lawnside, and these accusations indicate the ignorance that some Haddon Heights and Barrington residents had about their neighbours.[38] For example, one Haddon Heights resident who attended 3HS in the 1960s and early 1970s related the reaction of her parents when she went home and informed them that she was invited

[33] M.O., "Inter-Racial Body Created at Heights," *The Scribe*, Haddon Heights, N.J., Oct. 28, 1965, 1.
[34] Gordon Higgs, Interview by Clinton Higgs Jr., Aug. 10, 2006, "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.
[35] "Tension Along Border: Cure Sought for Racial Strife," *Courier Post*, May 12, 1969, 19.
[36] Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship, 15.
[37] "Tension Along Border," 19. I was unable to uncover any evidence to determine what caused these early fights. The Haddon Heights Board of Education minutes have no information about the 1968 Board of Education meetings and there was very little supporting information in school and local newspapers. I speculate that the first few fights were not taken too seriously. The 1969 and 1971 incidents were a different story.
[38] Barrington was also a majority white community in the 1960s and 1970s that was too small to have its own high school. They also had a send/receive relationship with Haddon Heights and sent their children to 3HS.

to, and planned to attend a party in Lawnside. She stated, "I wasn't allowed to go because it was in a black neighbourhood… my father said it would be too dangerous for me to go down there."[39] Thus, Lawnside's municipal borders continued to represent a highly alienated borderland, with little cross-cultural contact with the communities of Haddon Heights and Barrington other than the shared use of 3HS.

On April 10, 1969 3HS experienced the worst episode of racial violence to date. That morning at least thirty-six young men engaged in fighting entirely along racial lines. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* attributed the 'melee' to "Negro Retaliation" for three nights of fighting that long weekend at a burger stand which straddled the border between Barrington and Lawnside. In one of the precipitating fights, it was alleged that white youth attacked a much younger African American boy.[40] Thus, the preceding days of violence at the burger stand were a trigger factor for the violence at the high school. However, that episode alone may have simply exacerbated long standing frustrations that Lawnside young people felt because of their educational and social experiences at 3HS. Regardless, one African American student explained that approximately twenty Lawnside students gathered outside the school that morning with the intention of "retaliating against the individual white boys who started the trouble." Police and faculty eventually broke up the fight approximately half an hour after it started. One youth suffered a fractured nose, another was so bruised he missed school for eleven days, and eight others suffered minor injuries. Fearing for their security, most African American members of the student body left school and made their way home on foot through Barrington.[41] In a 2016 interview, Kenneth MacGregor stated that he often drove or followed African American students home to ensure their safety.[42] African American students would also express the same fears over personal safety in the aftermath of a larger instance of racial violence at 3HS in 1971.[43]

[39] Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, August. 8, 2016.
[40] "Negro 'Retaliation' Blamed in Fight at Haddon Heights," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, New Jersey Edition, Apr. 12, 1969, 1.
[41] "Tension Along Border," 19.
[42] MacGregor, Jul. 27, 2016.
[43] Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," May 16, 1971.

Oral testimonies and school board minutes also augment the media reports of the 1969 episode of collective violence, although these are somewhat unreliable because many former students and staff have conflated the 1969 event with their memories of the larger 1971 racial incident. However, this much is clear: all eighteen students from Lawnside who participated in the fight were suspended while only one white student was eventually suspended two weeks after the incident. Three Lawnside students received suspensions ranging from three to ten days, and two were expelled for the remainder of the school year.[44] It is also notable that Haddon Heights school administrators included a young woman from a prominent Lawnside family who also had close ties to senior members of the Young Blacks on the discipline list. This woman was not involved in the actual fighting but was implicated as a leader of the Lawnside cohort during the altercations.[45] Higgs attributed her inclusion and the disciplining of other members of the Young Blacks to targeting by Haddon Heights school officials.[46]

The unequal disciplinary approach elicited charges of discrimination and criticism from Lawnside community leaders. Lawnside's mayor, Hilliard T. Moore, stated that the disciplining of African American students "may have been biased."[47] A group of fifty Lawnside residents also presented the Haddon Heights Board of Education with a signed statement questioning the fairness of their decision making.[48] This is the most notable collective action by Lawnside parents acting on behalf of their children during this troubled time. Part of the degree of alienation that Lawnside students felt at 3HS was that the school was not part of Lawnside, and thus, their parents were not a notable presence in the school community. This reality, and the conservative approach of Lawnside civic leaders, would give Lawnside youth a space to exert acts of agency not seen in other African American school protests, which were often led by adults and community organizations.

[44] "Tension Along Border," 19.
[45] Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Apr. 23, 1969.
[46] Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.
[47] Lawnside School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Apr. 21, 1969.
[48] "Tension Along Border," 19.

Immediate responsibility for the 1969 fight has been attributed by multiple sources to Lawnside youth. In a 2016 interview, Kenneth MacGregor ascribed blame for the brawl directly to a specific Lawnside student.[49] Similarly, at a 2016 community event I attended in Lawnside, several former 3HS students recalled that same student as angered and on a mission to do something. Higgs' testimony also supports this conclusion: "The two guys who got expelled were not members of the Young Blacks. They were the aggressors and they started everything."[50] The violence at 3HS had additional repercussions for the community of Lawnside.

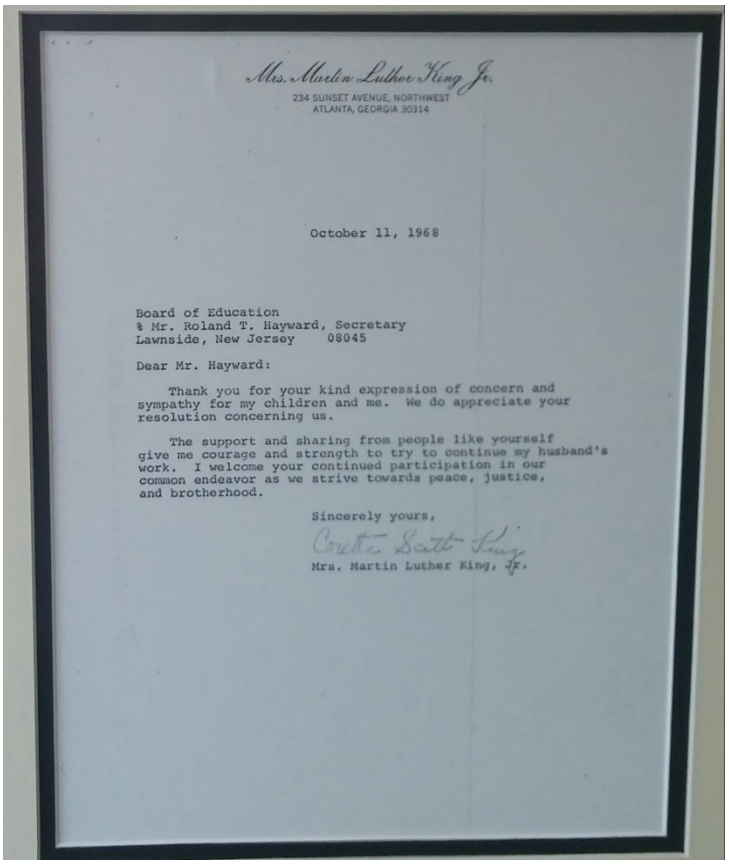
The immediate aftermath of the fight sparked white student vigilante behaviour and sentiments.[51] On the day of the fight, Haddon Heights police arrested six white youths who were driving in the area of the school armed with clubs and bricks. These young men were charged with disorderly conduct. For several nights after the fight, carloads of white youths drove into Lawnside along Warwick Road.[52] They armed themselves with pipes and chains seeking trouble by "hurling bottles, rocks, and insults from their car windows.[53] A group of 3HS students from Barrington and Haddon Heights also sought to create a white protection group in response to the racial violence. The group's stated purpose was to "stop any more trouble by black militants."[54] Presumably, it was whites who also shot at two homes in Lawnside in the aftermath of the event. In May 1969, the *Courier Post* reported that Luther Wright of Lawnside was awoken at 3 am by a loud noise. Authorities discovered three bullet holes in Wright's home and identified a .38 caliber slug lodged in his bedroom doorway. A second shooting at a separate home in Lawnside

[49] MacGregor, Jul. 27, 2016.
[50] Higgs, Aug. 23, 2017.
[51] A Barrington resident named James Vine formed an organization called the Committee for Human Understanding which held meetings that attempted to facilitate community discussion in the wake of the April 1969 violence. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that Vine was ostracized and treated with contempt by some Barrington residents for his efforts. Vine claims that Haddon Heights School District officials attempted to turn him away when he arrived at a scheduled appointment to present his organization's recommendations. He believes this is because there was an informant in his group who tipped off school officials about the group's arguments. Hoag Levins, "Couple Ostracized for Urging Racial Discussions," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, New Jersey Section, May 11, 1969, 1; and James Vine, Interview by Jason Romisher, Oct. 18, 2016.
[52] The Whitehorse Pike and Warwick Road are two busy roads which go directly through Lawnside. It would be difficult for the small Lawnside police force to maintain a constant police presence at several points along these thoroughfares.
[53] "Tension Along Border," 19.
[54] "Home Course in Hate: Race Trouble Doesn't Start at School," *Courier Post*, May 13, 1969, 13.

shattered the window of a children's nursery.[55] Fortunately, there were no significant acts of violent retaliation for these actions by Lawnside youth.

African American students from Lawnside also engaged in non-violent direct action at 3HS. In 1969, African American students at 3HS engaged in their first major act of political rebellion. On April 9, 1968, the day of Martin Luther King's funeral, the Lawnside Board of Education claims they were the first institutional body in the United States to make Dr. King's birthday a holiday.[56] On January 15, Lawnside students participated in a sit-in at 3HS on Dr. King's birthday to be in solidarity with their community's holiday and to argue for its adoption by school officials.[57] The students maintained a silent protest despite warnings of detention and suspension by Principal Bucher if they did not go immediately to class. When a school bus arrived to take the Lawnside students home, Marie Young, an executive in the Young Blacks, finally rose and explained the reason for the protest.[58] According to Shockley, while no suspensions or punishments were meted out, nothing was written about the event in the school newspaper, *The Scribe*, and nothing was done to address the complaint.[59]

[55] "Tension Along Border," 19.
[56] Lawnside School District, "Board of Education Minutes," Apr. 9, 1968.
[57] Linda Shockley, "I Just Never Understood…," *Advisor Update*, Fall 2013, 10a.
[58] Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016.
[59] Linda Shockley, "I Just Never Understood…" Several Lawnside citizens familiar with this event also claim that the *Courier Post* denied interest in covering the sit-in.


Mrs. Martin Luther King Jr.
234 SUNSET AVENUE, NORTHWEST
ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30314

October 11, 1968

Board of Education
% Mr. Roland T. Hayward, Secretary
Lawnside, New Jersey 08045

Dear Mr. Hayward:

Thank you for your kind expression of concern and sympathy for my children and me. We do appreciate your resolution concerning us.

The support and sharing from people like yourself give me courage and strength to try to continue my husband's work. I welcome your continued participation in our common endeavor as we strive towards peace, justice, and brotherhood.

Sincerely yours,

Coretta Scott King

Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Figure 2. *The Lawnside Board of Education Resolution adopting Dr. King's birthday as a holiday is framed alongside a thank you letter from Coretta Scott King in the entrance of both the Lawnside Public School and Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church. Photograph by Jason Romisher.*

On January 12, 1970, Lawnside students organized a second sit-in at 3HS to protest the dismissal of Ms. Corbin, a young, recently hired African American teacher.[60] Higgs recalled that Corbin was beloved by the Lawnside students and that she sought assistance and support from The Young Blacks in order to keep her job.[61] Kenneth MacGregor explained that Corbin was repeatedly late, had been given multiple warnings which escalated to an ultimatum, and was finally dismissed when her conduct did not improve.[62] Corbin acknowledged that Superintendent Gansz had stated that the reason for her dismissal was continued lateness, but she believed the real reason was her complaints over an unfavourable teaching schedule, a disagreement which the *Courier Post* described as "protesting" in nature. Corbin also claimed that her lunch was shortened to twenty-two minutes.[63]

[60] "Student Sit-Ins at HHHS," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 12, 1970, 1.
[61] Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.
[62] MacGregor, Jul. 27, 2016.
[63] "Blacks Stage Boycott in Firing of Teacher," *Courier Post*, Jan. 12, 1970, 11.

Lawnside students believed there were other reasons at play. They did not appreciate the answers administrators provided to students who directly inquired about the dismissal. The sit-in included 108 students who were all African American, and no white student participation. The students stayed seated until 1:40 p.m., when they moved to the girls' gym to meet with school Superintendent Herbert Gansz, the school administration, various faculty members, and the Superintendent of Camden County Schools.[64] However, the sit-in and the support of The Young Blacks was not enough to save Corbin's job.[65] Her dismissal left 3HS with just one African American teacher, a void which Superintendent Gansz was eager to fill. Gansz declared that 3HS had made "vigorous efforts" to hire African American faculty members but had experienced difficulties with recruitment due to high demand.[66]

The 1969-70 school year passed without violence but did include another notable instance of constructive efforts by Lawnside students. In the spring of 1970, students from Lawnside presented a list of five suggestions to the school administration which codified the grievances they felt needed to be addressed. They wanted more African American instructional emphasis in History, Sociology, and English Literature. They also called for more representation on the school's Interracial Council, as well as the recruitment of African American teachers. The administration did heed their suggestions and hired a few African American teachers over the coming years. There were also attempts to redesign the curriculum, and the library increased its holdings of African American history and literature from seventy books to over 500.[67] There were other notable efforts by Lawnside students to effect change at 3HS.

Linda Shockley was motivated to help erase the silence of the African American student body at 3HS by contributing to the student newspaper. She began writing articles that demonstrated a great degree of political understanding and insight. Writing in *The Scribe* in 1970, Shockley described and discussed the

[64]"Student Sit-Ins at HHHS," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 12, 1970, 1.
[65] Higgs, Aug. 12, 2016.
[66] "Blacks Stage Boycott in Firing of Teacher," 11.
[67] "Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship," 15.

Revolutionary Peoples' Constitutional Conference at Temple University which was organized by the Black Panther Party. In her article, she brought the words of Huey Newton to a white community's high school student newspaper. Shockley concluded her article by stating, "Power or self-determination to the people."[68] In another article, she discussed what was known in those times as 'Black History Awareness Week:'

> The fact is apparent that black history has been the object of mutilation, neglect and intentional deletion by historians of remote and recent past. The valuable knowledge was denied us in a flagrant attempt to frustrate any avenue of inspiration for our self-determination. Somehow, we have managed to keep this precious information alive and achieve a degree of self-determination and respect… The week marks a period in which blacks make a special effort to reveal the motivating and too long whispered realities of our heritage. The many achievements made by blacks merit attention because the strenuous, highly rascist (sic) conditions under which they were contributed warrant it… Negro History Week can only serve as the beginning of an earnest attempt by the history department and its members to infuse black history into what is now called U.S. history… The black student, of history and of life has… [the] obligation to educate himself as much as possible in the wealth of his heritage. The ignorance of our counterparts is often frustration in the classroom but we must always remember that "The future's success lies in the lessons of the past."[69]

This statement encapsulates the frustration and sense of cultural alienation that African American students often experienced in a white-dominated educational system. It also explains a key motivation for protest by Lawnside students at 3HS. Shockley's contributions to *The Scribe* were another form of political activism exercised by Lawnside students.

Shockley's discussion of the way in which history had traditionally been taught and the importance of African American history to the education of all youth in America was a critique also levied by African American activists in the case study analyses done in Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Maywood. The protests that gripped America in the summer of 2017 over the legacy of Confederate monuments

[68] Linda Waller, "Black News," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), 2.
[69] Linda Waller, "A Beautiful Heritage Long But Needed," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights N.J.), Feb. 12, 1971, 2.

speak to how politically fraught the interpretation of American history can be. The frustration and cultural alienation that African Americans felt when confronted with a whitewashed history curriculum that justified and normalized actions such as slavery, the forced removal of Indigenous peoples, and numerous examples of aggressive foreign wars leading up to the quagmire that was Vietnam were eloquently expressed by Shockley.

On the eve of the chaotic events at 3HS on May 12, 1971, there had been little substantive change in the educational culture at the school despite multiple instances of violent conflict and non-violent activist efforts by the school's African American students. Lawnside youth had engaged in two sit-ins and issued a list of suggestions that school administrators tried in part to address. In response, there were efforts to decrease tensions through school clubs and information sessions, a handful of African American teachers were hired in a very competitive labour market, black studies courses were made available, and the school library did increase its holdings of African American cultural literature. Still, the school continued to have the following unequal characteristics: an inadequate African American studies program, very few staff members of colour, the continued streaming of African American students into general level courses, inadequate guidance department supports for African American students, inequality in some athletic and non-athletic extra-curricular activities, the absence of an African American cultural club, and the continued alienation of African American children from Lawnside who arrived across a racial borderline in the transition to high school. All that was needed was a spark to ignite this powder keg of inequality.

On May 12, 1971, Haddon Heights High School experienced a spontaneous explosion of bloody and chaotic racially motivated fighting. At that time, approximately 200 of the 1500 students at 3HS were African American.[70] The instigator of the violence was a female student from Lawnside who was allegedly disciplined the day before the school melee for a violent incident involving a white

[70] Robert E, Bradley, "Schools Shut After Racial Fights Will Reopen Monday," *Courier Post*, Sat. May 15, 1971, 6. The figure of 1500 is the total number of students at the school which includes the grade seven and eight middle school students from Haddon Heights of which none were African American.

male student.[71] The next morning, this female student was sent home along with another African American female student for fighting with two white female students.[72] She then returned to the school and got into a heated conversation with Principal Bucher that allegedly reached a crescendo when the student kicked him.[73] A white female student from Haddon Heights described what happened next:

> I remember the principal standing near the front, and a black female student talking to him very loudly and angrily. I then went to the other side of the cafeteria and saw groups of black male students sitting at tables near the windows, and across the aisle, white male students were sitting at tables. (The tables were long, rectangular tables.) Everyone seemed upset, maybe yelling at each other, and looking around. All of a sudden, the two groups of male students rushed at each other and were fighting. There was a tremendous amount of noise with yelling and tables and chairs being pushed and knocked over, and I recall seeing a chair that someone had flung fly through the air.[74]

News of the fighting spread quickly through the school and several students left class to partake. A middle school teacher named Ms. Bottinelli had a classroom near the cafeteria. Her 2016 recounting of that eventful morning captures the fear and chaos in the school:

> I had a class of 7th grade boys. One of the boys was teaching the class that day as a student teacher… In addition to my 30 kids, I had 15 6th graders and 2 moms visiting to see what the school was like for next year when they would enroll… My classroom was directly across from the cafeteria. I heard loud noises, bangs, crying, screams outside my door. I quickly went out the door, realizing I could hardly open it and something bad was happening, but I pulled down the shade and locked the door so no one could get to my kids… Someone was frantically banging on the door. I opened it a crack and saw one of my 7th graders from another class. I pulled him by his shirt into the room and locked the door again. His hair was ruffled and his shirt was ripped out. The mothers in the room were wide eyed and frightened. Another bang on the door. Two of my Lawnside girls were seeking refuge. They were scared and angry and a little bloodied. I took them to my sink to wash the blood off. The mothers had gathered the kids together and started losing it. My kids were calm, quiet and waiting for direction from me. Another knock on the

[71] Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Sep. 13, 2016.
[72] "Fight Breaks Out at Heights High School," *The Suburban*, May, 13, 1971, 1. The white female students were also sent home.
[73] Anonymous Man, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 2, 2016.
[74] Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 26, 2016.

> door. Police. I had to keep everyone locked in until they told me it was safe to release people in groups. I released the panic stricken mothers and visiting kids first. Then I released my two kids in 2 groups. Kids were told to go straight home. Run home.[75]

After police had secured the building and restored calm, officials ordered the remaining students to vacate school property. Some Lawnside students were sent home on a bus that unloaded everyone at Borough Hall. In 2016, I spoke to a man from Lawnside who was not yet of high school age in 1971. He vividly recalled the scene in 1971 of beaten and bloodied students getting off the bus in Lawnside that day.[76] There were no serious injuries reported and only one student was treated at hospital for head and facial bruises.[77] The aftermath of the violence and chaotic confusion further demonstrated how vast the racial divide was at 3HS and its associated communities.

Community, school, and state officials scrambled to ascertain the causes of the violence and determine which students and how many were involved. School administrators closed 3HS for the next two days as they earnestly sought solutions to the chaotic unrest and a return to normalcy. [78] Some teachers from 3HS met with parents at Lawnside's Mt. Pisgah AME Church where they engaged in dialogue and listened to concerns.[79] The State of New Jersey ordered an inquiry into the violence and dispatched an official task force from the New Jersey Department of Education. The Task Force members were William Block, an assistant in the State Department of Education's Office of Equal Educational Opportunity, and Ronald Lewis, Director of the Department's Office of Program Development. Block and Lewis attended a community meeting in Haddon Heights and made some pointed comments afterward. Block stated, "This situation is really the fruition of elementary school segregation. If the students are isolated racially from kindergarten up and then brought together in high school, it's a volatile situation." Lewis added, "The lack of

[75] Connie Bottenelli, "You Might Have Grown Up in Haddon Heights if you Remember," Facebook Group post, Jul. 26, 2016.
[76] Conversation at the 2016 Ralph G. Jordan III Fundraiser.
[77] Carol Comegno and Dan Lang, "2 High Schools Hit By Racial Strife," *Courier Post*, May 13, 1971, 1.
[78] Comegno and Lang, "2 High Schools," 1.
[79] Helen Panesis, "Heights High is Disrupted by Incident," *The Town Crier & Herald* (Haddonfield N.J.), May 20, 1971, 1.

communication is there. I find the same fears and stereotypes here that kind of pervade the country."[80] Supporting Block and Lewis' discussion of elementary segregation as a key factor in racial tensions at 3HS were the remarks of a white 3HS student who participated in fighting with Lawnside students. He indicated that most of the problems occurred with younger students, and that by the senior grades bonds and familiarity negated racial disturbances.[81] This sentiment was also expressed by Principal Bucher in the aftermath of the 1969 incident of racial violence.[82]

The school administrators at 3HS were determined that the school would reopen on the Monday following the violence and devised a transitional approach in order to maintain order and control. In their plan, the different cohort levels of students – freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior – would return to 3HS on different half days.[83] This plan failed because Lawnside students and community leaders refused to send a fraction of the African American student body into Haddon Heights due to security concerns.[84]

Lawnside students also resisted the plans of the 3HS school administration. On May 17, 1971, Linda Whittington, a student from Lawnside and a member of the Grievance Committee at 3HS, announced at a press conference that Lawnside students had boycotted a meeting with 3HS school officials because the administration had failed to enact a series of suggestions submitted by the Grievance Committee. The Committee had asked the administration to: ensure amnesty for all participants in the violence, reopen the school with all students returning together, and give the Grievance Committee the right to patrol the hallways and mediate disputes. Whittington also told reporters that four African American students had tried to go to school on Monday, the first day of the failed, planned transitional reopening of 3HS, and two were attacked and left school

[80] Bradley, "Schools Shut," 6.
[81] Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 29, 2016.
[82] "Home Course in Hate," 13.
[83] "Black Students Boycott School," *The Suburban*, May 20, 1971, 1.
[84] Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," May 16, 1971.

running."[85] In this atmosphere of fear and distrust, Lawnside students decided to make a grand statement.

The day after Whittington's press conference, 172 African American students engaged in a protest march from Lawnside to Haddon Heights to deliver a list of thirteen demands to the school administration.[86] This action was both a statement against inequality at 3HS as well as a show of power and determination in the face of racist community behaviour. The march began at Lawnside Borough Hall and proceeded along Warwick Road and Mercer Avenue in Barrington before turning at First Avenue in Haddon Heights. The march symbolized the true racial divide that separated the communities and the hostility experienced by some Lawnside students who felt they were in enemy territory. Fifty years after he attended 3HS, Higgs still recalls the sight of African American garden gnomes in the yards of white homeowners and being called a chocolate baby on the walk to school.[87] In a most egregious example of white homeowner anger at the parade of African American bodies walking past their homes everyday, a woman named her dog "Nigger" and would intentionally place the dog in the yard and call it when Lawnside students were passing by.[88] The starkness of the racial divide is also illustrated by a former Haddon Heights resident from the class of 1972 who remarked that the African American students from Lawnside were no different to him than the furniture at school. He also described them as nonentities who were not even worthy of his consideration.[89] Furthermore, a female student from Lawnside also recalls being stared at when showering during physical education class and overhearing white students remarking how the African American students did not in fact have tails.[90] The march also revealed another notable instance of African American female leadership.

[85] Dan Lang, "Black Students Stage Protest," *The Courier Post*, May 18, 1971, 1, 4.
[86] Douglas Campbell, "Blacks List Demands, Still Boycott Classes," *The Courier Post*, May 19, 1971, 27.
[87] Higgs, Aug. 12, 2006.
[88] Shockley, Jul. 9, 2016; and Anonymous Woman, Aug. 2, 2016
[89] Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 14, 2016.
[90] Anonymous Woman, Aug. 2, 2016.

The students from Lawnside selected Denise Greene to formally present their petition to Principal Bucher. Greene stated to reporters, "We didn't walk this far because we didn't mean it. If they don't [respond], we'll have to take the next step. The only thing we want are some things we've been asking for for years."[91] After delivering the petition, the Lawnside students calmly turned and marched home. Due to a lack of communication amongst students across these racially divided municipalities, few, if any white students knew about this march, and none participated in solidarity.[92]

Figure 3. *Denise Greene presenting Principal Gordon Bucher with a petition after the 1971 Lawnside student protest march to Haddon Heights High School. Gary L. Shivers, Courier Post, May 19, 1971, 27.*

[91] Campbell, "Blacks List Demands," 27.
[92] Both the interviews I conducted and social media statements indicate that students from Barrington and Haddon Heights were not aware of this protest effort.

The school administration elected to discipline several students for their role and actions during the melee. While African American students bore the brunt of the punishment, in contrast to the 1969 incident, white students were also punished. Administrators disciplined forty-six students. The only student expelled for the remainder of the school year was the young woman from Lawnside who initiated the conflict that day. Officials insisted she complete psychological therapy before being reinstated. In contrast, the male student from Lawnside who allegedly initiated the April 1969 racial fight did not have any psychotherapy stipulation attached to his reinstatement. Thus, a gender bias becomes evident in the interpretation of violence by these school officials. Perhaps administrators interpreted violent behaviour by male students as normal and by female students as abnormal. This could also imply that administrators interpreted the highly aggressive behaviours of this student as symptoms of a gendered psychological disorder and not the result of systemic inequality and mistreatment. School administrators also suspended two other students, whose race is unknown, for three days. They charged another student with four offences, one of whom was "sitting-in," and placed a detailed letter of probation in this student's permanent record. The inclusion of 'sitting-in' as a punishable offence reveals the antipathy of some school administrators toward non-violent political acts by the African American student body. Administrators also sent letters of probation to twelve other students, wrote letters of warning to thirty more, and placed all the correspondence in their school records.[93]

When students finally returned to school, those who had previously established friendships across the racial divide often discovered that those bonds were now severed. In a 2016 interview, a white member of a varsity team in 1971 expressed great sadness and contemplation when he related that his teammate from Lawnside stopped sitting with him in the school cafeteria after the incident.[94] An interracial school club named Students Organized for Togetherness (SOFT) that

[93] Haddon Heights School District, "Board of Education Minutes," May 16, 1971.
[94] Anonymous, Interview by Jason Romisher, Jul. 28, 2016.

worked to improve race-relations at 3HS issued a solemn statement in the 1971 yearbook entitled "Racial Harmony. Is it Possible at 3HS?" It stated:

> S.O.F.T. as this book goes to press, is in the midst of a re-evaluation of its aims and methods. Racial tension has been an unfortunate problem at Haddon Heights High School for a number of years, and it shows no signs of waning in the near future. S.O.F.T., totally a student group, has in the past directed its efforts towards promoting and understanding through student discussions and community presentations. These methods being ineffective, and an understanding that a school group cannot deal with racist attitudes formed outside the school, were the reasons for the self appraisal of the group. Possibly S.O.F.T. will arrive at a formula for dealing with the racial problem in the three communities. If not, 3HS will have more problems to deal with in the future."[95]

This statement reveals how pessimistic some students were about the state of race-relations in the wake of this latest incident and several years of fights and severe tensions.[96] In this atmosphere, 3HS like much of America was seemingly on the brink of anarchy, revolution, and a very uncertain future.

The June 16, 1971 edition of *The Scribe* became a forum about the incident and included the demands made by Lawnside students as well as commentary by Linda Shockley, who wrote: "When the black student body is no longer feared as a destructive monster and is understood as the potentially constructive body of concerned students that it is, better relations between the different races of the student population and better relations with the faculty and administration will begin to materialize."[97]The demands by Lawnside students were the following:

> WE DEMAND:
>
> 1. We want a black advisor and more Black teachers with the Black Student Union able to view the qualifications with the right to except or reject the proposal.
>
> 2. We want our own student organization entitled the Black Student Union.

[95] "The Garnetteer," Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, 1971.
[96] It is also noteworthy that blame is partially ascribed to the influence of racist parenting. In a 1969 *Courier Post* investigation about the racial tensions at 3HS, racist parenting was explored. One white 3HS student, "Charley," was instructed by his father to "not bother coming home if ⌈he⌋ ever br⌈ought⌋ a nigger ⌈home⌋." *Home Course in Hate*, 13.
[97] Linda Waller, "Right On!," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971, 2.

3. We want a Black Studies Program initiated at Haddon Heights High School that would consist of courses in Black History, Black Literature, Black Arts and any courses relevant to our needs.

4. We want certain days off to observe black holidays such as Martin Luther King and Malcolm X's birthday. On these days the school will be officially closed.

5. We want to hold Black activities such as dances and meeting in the school.

6. We want the history of Lawnside in the library. This will give us a sense of freedom and pride.

7. We want an information table, not only Black, which will offer literature from Black organizations regardless of their political viewpoints.

8. We want the right to invite speakers from any black organization into the school.

9. We want Black or interracial assemblies.

10. We want full library use without certain books being denied us. Also, when using the library facilities, we want ample time to work without being told to hurry up.

11. We demand that the faculty refrain from using profane language to any student in class

12. We demand to be allowed to survey the book list in the library and classes. The Black Students Union wants the right to make additions or subtractions to this list.

13. We want amnesty for everyone involved in the melee.[98]

These demands represented cultural and educational concerns, as well as community control over decision making. They are consistent with the demands issued in the case studies examined from Maywood, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Boston, and Detroit. This demonstrates that African American youth throughout America in cities, suburbs, and small towns had significant grievances with the inequality and curriculum content present in their high schools.

The incredible activist response and organizational efforts by Lawnside students in the aftermath of the racial violence occurred without significant involvement by Lawnside parents and community leaders. Unlike their reaction to

[98] "We Demand," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971.

the 1969 racial violence, there was no petition from Lawnside parents and no pronouncements by Lawnside's political leaders. The 1969 episode of racial violence elicited a response because, initially, the only students who were suspended were African American. In 1971, 3HS school officials suspended a significant number of white students which negated a key motivation for action that was present in 1969. The longstanding grievances that students from Lawnside expressed were not championed by parents and community leaders. Perhaps this was due to the conservative nature of Lawnside community leaders, who did not wish to see its young people engage in the violence and upheaval experienced in so many other communities. Lawnside was a community on the rise with exciting new corporate investments and housing developments. Angry youth interfering in community politics and starting fights in school cafeterias were seen as unnecessary distractions from development and progress.[99] This was reflected in Lawnside Board of Education President Morris Smith's refusal to engage with the Young Blacks' efforts to challenge policy decisions at Board meetings.[100] The Young Blacks of Lawnside also did not interfere or direct student initiatives at 3HS. One reason for non-interference by the Young Blacks was that President Gordon Higgs described the student leaders as extremely intelligent, capable, and not in need of any help or advice. As examples to illustrate his point, Higgs specifically named Marie Young and Linda Shockley. Another significant factor mentioned by Higgs was that the leadership of the Young Blacks risked arrest if they crossed into Haddon Heights.[101] Thus, the conservative nature of Lawnside community leaders provided an opportunity for highly capable and politicized youth to demonstrate independent acts of agency not seen in other case studies of African American high school student activism.

The Lawnside Board of Education was concerned about the disciplinary powers wielded by the Haddon Heights Board of Education, and unsuccessfully

[99] Historian Kevin Kruse explains that Atlanta also experienced a generational divide where young reformers keen on achieving rapid civil rights gains dramatically clashed with older leaders who defended a gradualist approach.
Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
[100] Smith, Jul. 26, 2016.
[101] Higgs, Aug, 12, 2016

appealed to the State to gain disciplinary control over 3HS students from Lawnside. The State ruled, "The students in the system are responsible only to Haddon Heights and subject to the Haddon Heights administration and must act in accordance with their rules and regulations."[102] New Jersey's culture of strong municipal control was maintained and upheld by the state's powerbrokers.

Haddon Heights school authorities reacted to the events by implementing measures to address some of the students' demands in the hopes of preventing future racial incidents at 3HS. Efforts continued by the administration to hire African American teachers and add African American studies courses to the school curriculum. The school also heeded a primary demand from the student activists and approved the establishment of the Afro-American Cultural Society.[103] The administration also listened to the State Task Force members' warning that residential segregation prior to the ninth grade created unfamiliarity between the students from the different feeder communities. To provide the future students of 3HS with opportunities to build trust and community, incoming freshmen from the three towns of Haddon Heights, Barrington, and Lawnside began attending a summer camp together to build trust and understanding.[104] These actions did not placate some Lawnside students who graduated in 1972. One Lawnside graduate wrote as her last will and testament in *The Scribe*, "I DO HEREBY BEQUETH to all revolutionary brothers and sisters: pride, power, and unity." Another wrote, "I DO HEREBY BEQUETH to the Black Student body the strength and determination to endure any arrogance or ignorance you may encounter. The courage and capability to alter it."[105]

To conclude, African American young people from Lawnside engaged in significant political activism and student agency without the direction and guidance

[102] Donna Kovalevich,"Lawnside Agrees to Pay Tuition Bill," *The Suburban*, Aug. 19, 1971, 1.
[103] "Cultural Society Plans Activities," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 23, 1972, 1
[104] "Advisory Committee Discusses Policy Changes," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Nov. 24, 1971, 1. Former 3HS Principal Ronald Corn, explained in a 2016 interview, that this is a practice that continues to the present day. Ronald Corn, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 24, 2016. At a 2017 lecture at Rutgers University that I delivered about my research, several current 3HS students from Lawnside expressed that the pre-high school activities suffer from lack of participation and did little to create a sense of community between the students from the different eighth grade cohorts.
[105] "Last Will and Testament," *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 12, 1972, 3.

of parents, Lawnside community leaders, or African American organizations. In 1969, Lawnside students participated in the school's first sit-in to protest the non-recognition of Martin Luther King's birthday as a school holiday. In 1970, a second sit-in occurred over the decision by 3HS administrators to dismiss an African American teacher. Lawnside students also issued a list of suggestions in the Spring of 1970, and participated in a boycott, protest march, and delivered a formal list of demands after the 1971 episode of racial violence. The conservative nature of Lawnside's civic leadership in conjunction with the residential segregation of Barrington, Haddon Heights, and Lawnside created this space for political agency.

The leadership efforts demonstrated by Marie Young, Denise Greene, and Linda Whittington, in conjunction with Linda Shockley's contributions to *The Scribe* also reveal that young women were instrumental to African American student activism at 3HS. In addition to Shockley's politicized articles, Marie Young held an executive position with the Young Blacks and led the 1969 sit in on Martin Luther King's birthday. Linda Whittington was a member of the 3HS grievance committee and served as Lawnside's student spokesperson to the media during a press conference in the aftermath of the 1971 racial violence. In addition, Denise Greene was selected by Lawnside students to present the petition to Principal Bucher during the 1971 protest march. The activism demonstrated by Shockley, Young, Whittington, Greene, and others adds to the ongoing historical effort of recovering female agency and leadership in African American organizational and student movements.

Bibliography

"Advisory Committee Discusses Policy Changes." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Nov. 24, 1971, 1.

Anonymous. Interview by Jason Romisher. Jul. 26. 2016.

Anonymous. Interview by Jason Romisher. Jul. 28, 2016.

Anonymous. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 8, 2016.

Anonymous. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 14, 2016.

Anonymous. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 29, 2016.

Anonymous. Interview by Jason Romisher. Sep. 13, 2016.

Anonymous Man. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 2, 2016.

Anonymous Woman. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 2, 2016

Benson, Ellen Jackson. Interview by Dr. James Rada and Linda Shockley. "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project," Aug. 10, 2006. Location: Paul Robeson Library, Rutgers University.

"Blacks Stage Boycott in Firing of Teacher." *Courier Post*, Jan. 12, 1970, 11.

"Black Students Boycott School." *The Suburban*, May 20, 1971, 1. Location: Haddon Heights Public Library Archives.

Blaustein, Albert P. "Civil Rights U.S.A., Public Schools Cities in the North and West, 1963, Camden and Environs: Staff Report Submitted to The United States Commission on Civil Rights." 1963. Location: Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Bradley, Robert E. "Schools Shut After Racial Fights Will Reopen Monday." *Courier Post*, Sat. May 15, 1971, 6.

Bundy, Tess. "Black Student Power in Boston." African American Intellectual History Society, Online Forum on Student Activism. Jan. 9, 2018. https://www.aaihs.org/black-student-power-in-boston/.

Campbell, Douglas. "Blacks List Demands, Still Boycott Classes." *Courier Post*, May 19, 1971, 27.

Carson, Clayborne. "Civil Rights Reform and the Black Freedom Struggle." In *The Civil Rights Movement in America*, edited by Charles W. Eagles. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986.

Cha-Jua, Sundiata and Lang, Clarence. "The "Long Movement" as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies." *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring, 2007): 265-288.

Comegno, Carol and Lang, Dan. "*2 High Schools Hit by Racial Strife.*" *Courier Post*, May 13, 1971, 1.

Countryman, Matthew. Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006.

Corn, Ronald, Interview by Jason Romisher, Aug. 24, 2016.

"Cultural Society Plans Activities." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 23, 1972, 1

Dent, David. *In Search of Black America: Discovering the African-American Dream.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

"Fight Breaks Out at Heights High School." *The Suburban*, May, 13, 1971, 1. Location: Haddon Heights Public Library Archives.

Gaines, Walter. Interview by Dr. James Rada and Shamele Jordan. "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." June 24, 2006. Location: Paul Robeson Library, Rutgers University.
Greason, Walter David. *Suburban Erasure: How the Suburbs Ended the Civil Rights Movement in New Jersey*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013.
Haddon Heights High School. The Garnetter, Haddon Heights High School Yearbook, Various Editions, Location: Haddon Heights Public Library.
Haddon Heights School District. "Board of Education Minutes."
Higgs, Gordon. Interview by Clinton Higgs Jr., Aug. 10, 2006. "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project." Location: Rutgers University, Paul Robeson Library, Special Collections.
Higgs, Gordon. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 12, 2016.
Higgs, Gordon. Interview by Jason Romisher. Aug. 23, 2017.
"Home Course in Hate: Race Trouble Doesn't Start at School." *Courier Post*, May 13, 1969, 13.
Kovalevich, Donna. "Lawnside Agrees to Pay Tuition Bill," *The Suburban*, Aug. 19, 1971, 1.
Kruse, Kevin. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.
Labaton, Stephen. "Denny's Restaurants to Pay $54 Million in Race Based Suits," The *New York Times*, May 25, 1994.
Lang, Dan. "Black Students Stage Protest." *Courier Post*, May 18, 1971, 1, 4.
Lawnside Historical Society, Inc., Pictorial Calendars. Location: Camden County Historical Society, Lawnside Vertical File.
Lawnside School District. "Board of Education Minutes."
Levins, Hoag. "Couple Ostracized for Urging Racial Discussions." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, New Jersey Section, May 11, 1969, 1.
MacGregor, Kenneth. Interview by Jason Romisher. Jul. 27, 2016.
M.O. "Inter-Racial Body Created at Heights." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Oct. 28, 1965, 1.
"Negro 'Retaliation' Blamed in Fight at Haddon Heights." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, New Jersey Edition, Apr. 12, 1969, 1.
Panesis, Helen. "Heights High is Disrupted by Incident." *The Town Crier & Herald* (Haddonfield N.J.), May 20, 1971, 1.
Pollitt, Lorraine. Interview by Dr. James Rada, Linda Shockley, and Raymond Fussell, C. Joyce Fowler. "Tell Lawnside's Oral History Project," Aug. 10, 2006. Location: Paul Robeson Library, Rutgers University.
"Race Trouble May Lead to Better Relationship." *Courier Post*, May 14, 1969, 15.
Romisher, Jason. "Youth Activism and the Black Freedom Struggle in Lawnside, New Jersey." MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 2018.
Rose, Harold M. "The All Negro Town: Its Evolution and Function." In *Black America: Geographic Perspectives*, edited by Robert T. Ernst and Lawrence Hugg, Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1976.
Self, Robert O. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
Shockley, Linda. Interview by Jason Romisher. Jul. 9, 2016.

Skolnick, Jerome, Director. "The Politics of Protest: Violent Aspects of Protest & Confrontation: A Staff Report to the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence." 1969.
Smith, Morris. Interview by Jason Romisher. Jul. 26, 2016.
"Student Sit-Ins at HHHS." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Feb. 12, 1970, 1.
Sugrue, Thomas J. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North.* New York: Random House, 2008.
"Tension Along Border: Cure Sought for Racial Strife." *Courier Post*, May 12, 1969, 19.
Theoharis, Jeanne. "W-A-L-K-O-U-T!": High School Students and the Development of Black Power in L.A." In *Black Power at the Local Level*, edited by Peniel E. Joseph. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
Vine, James. Interview by Jason Romisher. Oct. 18, 2016.
Walker, Dara. "Black Power and the Detroit High School Organizing Tradition." African American Intellectual History Society, Online Forum on Student Activism. Jan. 11, 2019. https://www.aaihs.org/black-power-and-the-detroit-high-school-organizing-tradition/.
Waller, Linda. "A Beautiful Heritage Long But Needed." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights N.J.), Feb. 12, 1971, 2.
Waller, Linda. "Black News." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), 2.
Waller, Linda. Right On! *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971, 2.
"We Demand." *The Scribe* (Haddon Heights, N.J.), Jun. 16, 1971.
Wright, Giles R. *Afro-Americans in New Jersey: A Short History* (Trenton: New Jersey Historical Commission, Department of State, 1988).