
Ariana Elise Podesta
Bard College, ap6588@bard.edu

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The Children Marching:

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies of Bard College

by
Ariana Podesta

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Introduction: The 1963 Children’s Crusade and the 1976 Soweto Uprising

“This story is about you.” This is the opening sentence in Toni Morrison’s book titled, *Remember*; it is a children’s book dedicated to telling the story of *Brown v Board of Education*. The stories of how youth activists have changed the course of history again and again remain relevant no matter how much time has passed. The mid to late Twentieth century was suffused with youth and student protest, from the youngest, kindergarten age students, to young adult aged college students. The 1968 demonstrations at La Sorbonne in France, and the 1970s anti-Vietnam War protests in the U.S., and the 1989 Tiananmen Square demonstrations in China are a few examples of the student uprisings that characterized much of the human-rights centered changes made during the latter half of the century. Two events in particular stand out for their striking similarities: the 1963 Children’s Crusade in Birmingham Alabama and the 1976 Soweto Uprising. These events parallel each other in how the marches themselves unfolded, the notable role played by the circulation of images from the marches afterwards, and these photographs’ ability to mobilize audiences around the change students sought to achieve.

Two moments in particular stand out for inspiring the idea to undertake a study comparing the Childrens’ Crusade and the Soweto Uprising. Both instances revolve around the photography that emerged from these two student protests. In the first instance, I was introduced to the images of the Children’s Crusade by a friend at Bard who was working on an art project inspired by photographs of the march. I told her that I had never heard of the Children’s Crusade before. In response, she laid out all of her printed images on the table in front of us. On the page in front of me was a silhouette of a human chain of children being hosed down by authorities. She explained to me how children had participated in the Civil Rights movement; it was not just
the icons that are repeatedly emphasized in history books. I was shocked, both because I had never heard of the Children’s Crusade before and because the images communicated the enormity of the sacrifices that the children had made. The importance of their role in the movement was clear.

The second meaningful encounter with photographs happened a year later later, while I was studying abroad in South Africa. As part of the program, we visited the Hector Pieterson Museum in Soweto. While we were there, my friend, our tour guide, and I stood in front of the museum's memorial for young Pieterson, who was murdered by authorities during the 1976 uprising. Our tour guide explained to us the importance of the photograph: how it captured the tragedy of the event and raised awareness for the struggle against apartheid. While he was explaining, he became perturbed because my friend chose to look away from the image. When he asked why she refused to look, she explained that she did not need to witness another image of a murdered Black person to understand the gravity of the event. She went on to describe the trauma of being repeatedly exposed to images of violence against Black bodies in the media. This prompted me to think about what role images serve in activism, as well as whether or not they are an effective means of creating a lasting public memory about an event. In both cases, the photographs became an enduring symbol of the violence of the time and the sacrifices made by students to further their civil rights movements. The striking similarities in the content and role of the images sparked comparisons between the two that led to the research questions this project seeks to answer.

_Warning: graphic images of the protests on the next page._

Thinking about the photographs in tandem prompted me to wonder how extensive the similarities between the two events actually were. The photographs display clearly the violent response by authorities to the march, and therefore the extent to which children risked their own safety in the name of the movement. However, the photographs cannot illustrate what led up to the marches. Because it is clear from the photographs the intense mental and physical distress the children went through in both the Children’s Crusade and the Soweto Uprising, I wondered whether the children acted of their own volition, or if there was adult intervention and support for the students. Hence the question; was the organization of these marches intergenerational, or did the students act independently of adult involvement? Thus, although my encounter with the photographs helped to generate the questions that this project will engage, this project does not center around the photography.

In this project, I will follow historian Robert Trent Vinson’s assertion that the freedom struggles in the United States and South Africa should be taken as two parts of the same whole, rather than reduced to a comparison. Observing their respective anti-racist struggles as separate negates the larger forces of imperialism and white supremacy at work, which were the common root of their struggles. In the United States, the Childrens’ Crusade was an effort to end segregation in the city of Birmingham, Alabama, while in South Africa, the Soweto Uprising was in an effort to prevent the implementation of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in government sponsored schools. Although these were the two main goals, the marches themselves were an overall attempt to push for Black empowerment as a whole. With their interconnected nature in mind, I want to acknowledge that being two parts of the same whole creates important similarities but does not mean that they are the same. The two marches have their specificities,
which make them unique to their respective contexts. In this project I hope to unpack some of the similarities and differences between the two events.

Additionally, I would like to contextualize the claims and history written in this paper with a quote by historian Adam Ashforth. He states in his article, “The Xhosa Cattle Killing and the Politics of Memory”:

On the one hand, we want to write history in a way that casts its subjects as agents. Thus they are also responsible for errors as well as successes. On the other hand, we want to demonstrate that the people about whom we write are subject to structures and forces that constrain the possibilities of their action.³

This quote highlights how historical subjects were at the mercy of what they were able to know at the time, and their actions were in response to the cultural and political structures and norms in place. Ashforth’s point pertains to the writing in this essay because when talking about the suffering and subjugation of people in the past, the goal is to acknowledge the wrongs done, not to belittle or dehumanize those subject to the violence any further. To keep this in mind means to keep the humanity and dignity of these historical actors in mind as well. They were active agents working for change within the subjugating structures in which they lived.

Because my project addresses the organizational lead-up to the marches, the introduction will provide the necessary context of what happened on the day of the marches themselves. Beginning with the U.S., May 2nd, 1963 marked the first day of the Children’s Crusade. It was organized by Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) leaders Reverend James Bevel and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, amongst other important activists. They titled the first day of the march ‘A March Toward Freedom’.

march, “D-Day”, which stood for “ditch” school.⁴ According to author Cynthia Levinson in her book, *We’ve Got a Job*, that morning opened with an announcement by popular Birmingham-local, WENN radio host, DJ Shelley Stewart, which signaled the beginning of the protest. That morning Stewart announced an undercover phrase to direct children to begin gathering, “Kids, there’s gonna be a party at the park. Bring your toothbrushes because lunch will be served.”⁵ Children streamed in from schools all around the city. Some checked in with their schools first, others went straight to the 16th Street Baptist Church. There were children who let their parents know of their involvement, and there were others who left without saying a word to them about their plan. In some cases, schools bused children to the march, while some teenagers drove together.⁶

As the children gathered, they alerted children from other schools through their shouts to join the efforts. Swept up in the excitement of the marching children, many more poured out into the street to support. Eventually, an estimated eight hundred children arrived at the 16th Street Baptist church where they would meet with SCLC leaders before the march. Bevel and King divided the children into groups of fifty, which the leaders would deploy one after another. Nonviolence was the key element of the march. The children were urged to remain peaceful at all times and were required to hand over anything that could be used as a weapon before they marched.

When the doors of the 16th Street Baptist Church opened to allow the first cohort of children into the street, they were met with a scene of parents, reporters, and authorities all

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⁶Levinson, p 71.
gathered and bustling around the street in anticipation of their entrance. To rally themselves and energize the groups, the children sang freedom songs such as, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” and “Oh, Freedom.” One after the other, each group of children was confronted by the police and crammed into a bus to be sent to the town’s juvenile detention center. By that evening, many of the hundreds of children had been arrested, but their efforts were not yet complete. SCLC members held a mass meeting that night to reconvene and plan for the day ahead.

The next day, on May 3rd, the efforts had more than doubled. The organization of the march was similar to that of the first day, except that Movement leaders had to adjust the childrens’ route based on new locations of the now bolstered law enforcement. On this day, it was not just police chief “Bull” Connor and his officers, but now it was their police dogs as well as firetrucks and firemen who lined the streets as well. Intemperate police chief Connor resorted to violent means as a way to suppress the masses of children and gain control. Firemen opened water hoses against the students, which tore at their clothes, hair, and skin, knocking them down the street into brick walls and cars. Eight german shepherds were used to attack protestors and frighten children into going home. By this time, some students who were rallied up by the commotion and angered by the response by police, took to roof tops to rain bricks and glass bottles onto the officer's heads. This was a smaller effort as a whole, as only two officers were injured as a result. Movement leaders were determined to have the protests remain thoroughly peaceful, and as a result Bevel announced through his bullhorn for the students to cease any agitating action.
The first two days set into motion what would become an intense week of protesting. The schools across Birmingham saw student attendance cut in half, and those students who were not arrested were determined to try again. Finally an agreement was reached, but even so, rallies, protest, violence by the Klan and police, as well as other consequences, such as arrests and expulsions continued through May.\(^7\) As a result of the protests, the Black residents of Birmingham, who had been fractured over what direction to take the movement in, were united in support of the childrens’ actions. Additionally, the attention of the public more nationally was captured through news articles about the events, and even President John F Kennedy- whose attention King had not been able to draw previously- finally addressed the issue of segregation in Birmingham.\(^8\)

Similarly, in South Africa, the day of the march was initially filled with excitement before the violent response by authorities caused chaos amongst the crowd. Bright and early on the morning of June 16th, 1976, children poured out of their homes and schools and into the streets to march in protest against the South African government’s decree that Afrikaans be the medium of instruction. The demonstration was planned only two days before by student activist leaders of the organization, the South African Students’ Organization, otherwise known as SASM. As a result, the schools with the greatest outpouring were the schools in which SASM members had the most established presence. Regardless of the students’ proximity to SASM, information was still able to spread throughout the township, making its way to schools and students on the periphery of SASM’s activity. The morning of the march, SASM organizers rallied students at their morning assemblies, instructing them to leave school, while other

\(^7\) Levinson, p 135.
\(^8\) Levinson, p 103.
students left home not for school but to the streets with signs in hand. For example, according to Seth Mazibuko, high school senior and prominent SASM organizer, Teboho MacDonald “Tsietsi” Mashinini arrived at school that morning, and politely asked to take the stage during the morning assembly. To the adult’s surprise, he called out to the students, “Amandla!,” meaning power, to which the student’s responded, “Awethu!” They proceeded to march out of the hall and into the street.

The plan was for students to march together to the Elkah Stadium in the center of Soweto, and gather to listen to a speech by student leader Mashinini. Well on their way to accomplish this plan, thousands of students marched from their schools and homes, arm-in-arm, down the streets of the township. The majority of the students sang “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”, or “God Bless Africa” and cheered with excitement as they took to the streets. According to police reports from the time, students created a disturbance through throwing rocks at authorities. However, with nonviolent intentions at the core of their movement, this was the rowdiest that the actions of the students became that morning. The violence that authorities meted out to the students was unparalleled by any disturbance caused by the students. According to historian Noor Nieftagodien, by 11am, police had fired the first round of bullets. This shocked and terrified the students. Those who were lucky to avoid the bullets scattered in the streets. The plan to meet at the auditorium and hold a peaceful gathering had vanished.⁹

In this study I will investigate the impact of the elder generations - the teachers, mentors, parents and grandparents of the young protestors. This attention to generational dynamics is based on my interest in wanting to know to what degree students acted on their own or with adult

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direction. To do this, in the first chapter I will outline the history of intergenerational involvement in the lead up to the Childrens’ Crusade and the Soweto Uprising. As the chapter lays out, in the U.S. there was more intentional adult involvement, while in South Africa there were important connections between adults and students, these relationships acted more as a supporting role to students’ efforts. These different generations involved in the movements laid out in chapter one include, student to student relationships, relationships with teachers and inspiration taken from older college students, as well as the relationship between students and their elders, mainly parents and prominent activists. In this chapter I will reference the work of authors Cynthia Levinson, Barbara Bennett Woodhouse, Rufus Burrow, Anne Heffernan, and Noor Nieftagodien. I will also be working from interview transcripts and personal testimonies from the participants Mark Mathabane, Sibongile Mkhabela, Seth Mazibuko, and Onkgopotse Tiro.

My second chapter continues with the question of what influenced the youth’s activism in these two marches. The first chapter details the local support and influence. The second chapter looks more broadly at what international dialogue was happening around Black freedom movements. Because instances of American influence on the students in South Africa were mentioned quite often in the sources I consulted, this international element seemed necessary to investigate. My second chapter reveals the American influence that was present in South African students’ political organizing. Conversely, it examines the international influence present in American activism. In America, although there was heavy reference to PanAfricanism and the continent as a whole, especially by adults, and later on, college students, there was less influence of international factors on the children of Birmingham. If there was international influence, it
would have been present through adult leadership, such as with Martin Luther King Jr. However, this was at most a passive or indirect kind of influence. In this chapter, I draw from the works of historians Robert Trent Vinson, Mark Malisa, Tyler Fleming, and Jeremy I. Levitt. As in the first chapter, I will be working from personal testimonies Mark Mathabane.

We so often revise history to emphasize the role of individuals, neglecting collectivized efforts to accomplish change. This is true for Civil Rights movements in particular. Icons sit on a pedestal in national history and tend to take center stage in public memory of past events. This can be seen in the examples of Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Mahatma Gandhi in India. Although their contributions to their respective freedom struggles cannot be understated, they are still positioned within the collective efforts of many other civil rights leaders and ordinary citizens. These two chapters highlight the nuanced ways in which community involvements, whether local or international, were necessary in guiding the actions of the students. Although the students were motivated to resist on their own, they still drew from sources that affirmed and supported their actions. Despite the varied levels of involvement of adults around them, both marches required some level of community involvement. Whether this meant direct organization by adults, such as with the SCLC members at the 16th Street Baptist church, or individual mentorships between students and teachers, such as with the example of Onkgopotse Tiro- a famous college student activist and later teacher- and hist student, Mashinini, the marches thrived as a result of community connections. These connections consisted of students’ relationships to their peers, with their elders, and within the activist community more broadly. So despite notions of individualism, community involvement is a component of effective resistance.
In this project, I used the terms students, youth, and children. Although there are some points at which these terms are interchangeable, there are also distinctions between them. All three terms ultimately refer to the same human beings, but in different contexts. Student refers to them in an organizational capacity; youth refers to generational differences, including college students who were younger than elder activists; and children identifies the actual elementary through high schoolers that were protestors in these marches. Also, in this project I have capitalized the identifying word, “Black”, and censored the term “n*gro”. These terms have had different connotations throughout history; however, to respect common current preferences in the usage of these words, I chose to use them in this way.
Chapter One: Intergenerational Involvement in Organizing the Marches

The Birmingham Children’s Crusade and the Soweto Uprising affected their respective social justice movements so deeply because the remarkably large student gatherings created an unprecedented furor in such a short period of time. Adult spectators were appalled at the violence with which governments met the student protestors. The adults’ shock at, yet reverence for, the actions of the students had deep cultural and societal resonance. The respective stories of the children protesters appeared in various forms in the public eye, for example, from popular music to magazine covers. Duke Ellington’s song “My People,” published in August of 1963, honors the actions of the students in Birmingham with the lyrics, “Little babies fit the battle of police dogs… the baby looked the dog right back in the eye and didn’t cry”\(^{10}\). In 1976, *Time* magazine featured Sam Nzima’s photograph of Hector Pieterson as one of the top 100 photographs that has shaped history, as it made international newspaper covers, such as *The World*, after the Soweto Uprising.

Despite the accomplishments of the students through the marches, some outlets framed the uprisings as young troublemakers merely having an emotional outburst of unsolicited rebellion.\(^{11}\) However, neither demonstration was created or organized impulsively. In this chapter, I will argue that the youth did not act alone but rather that adult involvement was crucial to both events, albeit in different ways. This chapter details the leadup to the respective marches and traces the adult involvement- in tandem with the independent organizational efforts of the

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\(^{11}\) Nieftagodien, p 81 and Levinson, p 82.
schoolchildren - that supported the outcome of each event. From investigating three different tiers of generational involvement, we can see how in the United States there was more intentional coordination by adults to lead student efforts, while in South Africa adults served key roles but the students were themselves the primary organizers of the Uprising. This is due to the fact that the adults in the U.S. were at the height of their movement, while in South Africa, the children had to re-energize the anti-apartheid efforts when the adult protests became less frequent.

In the childrens’ homelife and in their academic careers, their interaction with each other and the adults around them influenced their political thinking and organization. This included the

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conversations they engaged in, the scholars they read, the ideologies to which they subscribed, and the organizations to which they belonged. All of these dynamics will be elaborated on throughout this chapter. As a result, intergenerational relationships became a main factor in their political organization, with three main groups at the forefront. First, the adults that surrounded the children involved in the marches influenced their political thought; in particular, their family members and civil rights icons. Second, teachers and older student activists played a key role in the development of the student marches. Third, children were propelled by their common first hand experiences with racism to fight for their rights. In some cases, young people acted on their own. In other cases, children took a united stand against segregation and discrimination. Both demonstrate the important organization and action by youth that happened independent of adult intervention.

During the early 1950s and 1960s in the United States, leading up to the Children’s Crusade in the spring of 1963, a string of events occurred that- in addition to the everyday experiences of racial inequalities that children faced- motivated children to advocate for themselves. The juxtaposition of two main events informed American childrens’ consciousness during the 1950s. These two events were the Brown v Board of Education decision and the horrific murder of Emmett Till. First, in 1954, the Supreme Court case Brown v Board of Education drew national attention as it was the first case to challenge segregation within public schools. The ruling set legal precedent because it declared educational segregation to be unconstitutional. This was a major turning point in the effort to reverse one racist policy on which America pivoted. It also planted hope in the hearts of Black schoolchildren across

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America that they too would soon have access to the quality of education that their white counterparts had. John Lewis, a major civil rights campaign leader and SNCC founder and chairman, describes the initial impact that the Supreme Court decision had on him, “1954… just turned my world upside down… I remember the feeling of jubilation I had reading the newspaper…”  

Lewis’s phrase “turned my world upside down” underscores the gravity of the event on children’s lives. Because Lewis was living in Alabama during this time, and the court case began in Kansas, his perspective reveals that this was an important development for the entire country. Children across the nation would have similarly felt the effect of the decision.

However, despite what seemed like a major win in the fight against racism, the horrific murder of Emmett Till ensued just a year later in 1955. Till's age set his murder apart from other publicized racist violence. At just 14 years old, Till was brutally murdered by a gang of white men for supposedly flirting with a white woman at a convenience store. In response, his mother made the difficult decision to hold an open casket funeral to reveal the horror inflicted on her son.  

Witnessing the image of Till’s mutilated body on the cover of newspapers sent shockwaves across the country. Black children were especially affected. Lewis’ reminiscences on the era continued: “I was shaken to the core by the killing of Emmett Till… That could have been me… It had been only a year since I was so elated at the Brown decision. Now I felt like a fool.”

Lewis’s jarred reaction demonstrates the shock that the contrast of these two events posed for children. His account shows how, leading up to the 1963 march, the previous societal and

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16 Woodhouse, 136.
political successes and failures on behalf of Black children were in the consciousness of young people. This would have informed the actions of those headed into the protests because children knew the potential for change, yet understood the deadly risks involved.

The importance of the juxtaposition of these two events is shared by others who marched in the Children’s Crusade. Dr. Jan Willis, a current professor emerita of religion at Wesleyan university, marched in the Children’s Crusade as a tenth grader. During a talk titled "Buddhism and Activism," hosted by Professor Dominique Townsend at Bard College in 2021, Dr. Jan Willis recalled how Black children were under attack every day, making protests a childrens’ issue, not just an adults’ issue. During her talk, she specifically cited *Brown v Board of Education* and the murder of Emmett Till as two significant events in the buildup to children’s resistance. In an email correspondence, she continued, “on the ground… so much was actually played out around black children, i.e. if you hurt [or] stop them, you hurt [and] stop advancement.”¹⁷ Her comment reveals how children could not be protected from the realities of racism, and how their involvement in the movement was inevitable. Willis’s comment is supported by a quote from Bevel in reference to children's participation in the movement. He argued, “It was time to stop… trying to shield black children from something for which there was, finally, no shield.”¹⁸

In addition to the greater societal events that affected Black children in the U.S., their daily experiences with racism led them to join resistance efforts by their own volition. Levinson includes one story by student activist James W. Stewart that reveals the growing impetus towards action. He recalls one run in with Ku Klux Klan members in particular reoriented his perspective

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¹⁷ Dr. Jan Willis. Email correspondence with Ariana Podesta, February 23, 2021.
¹⁸ Burrow, p 110.
on protest before the Children’s Crusade took place. While Stewart was driving home from school, four white men, two in hoods, followed him. They chased, harassed, and threatened him until he finally lost their trail by hiding in a neighbor’s driveway. He states that escaping with his life from the incident, “made me ultimately stand up to the system and say, ‘No. I am not going to be confined.’”¹⁹ These types of daily encounters reinforced to children that their lives could not depend on avoiding the issues facing Black Americans. Despite their youth, they too were deeply affected by racism and in order to create a better life for themselves, resistance of some sort was necessary.

Furthermore, during the early 1960s, college students had become heavily involved in the movement as well. The activist efforts of older students during these early years of the 1960s demonstrated the potential of youth involvement in the movement, and played a role in inspiring other youth to join. With the help of SCLC executive director, Ella Baker, college age students helped to establish important organizations, such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), in 1960. As historian Barbara Ramsey states, “Ella Baker was a skilled grass-roots organizer--one who learned lessons from the street more than from the academy and who sought to understand the world in order to change it.”²⁰ Along this vein, Baker observed and was inspired by the actions of four college students who attempted to end segregation in restaurants by leading the first lunch counter sit-ins during February of 1960.²¹ Recognizing the power in the students' potential for effective resistance, she decided it was critical for these sporadic groups of college students to organize themselves. Baker reached out to Reverend Dr.

¹⁹Levinson, p 26.
²¹Ransby, p 237.
Martin Luther King Junior and together they decided it would be beneficial for the movement to have the leaders of these sit-ins meet with one another to strategize. Together, the two activists drafted a letter to 56 schools and 58 southern communities requesting delegates for a meeting.\textsuperscript{22} Their letter was successful and in April of that year, 126 Black student delegates from colleges and universities across the South, gathered at Shaw University in Raleigh North Carolina to meet with Baker and King.\textsuperscript{23} According to civil rights activist Diane Nash, there was an energy in the air and the students connected over their shared goals of equal rights and integration. Thus, the organization SNCC was born.

The contributions of college and college-aged activists on the movement is demonstrated by student activist Curtis (Hayes) Muhammad was a SNCC activist who joined the organization in May of 1961, at the age of eighteen. He recalls how witnessing the Freedom Riders bloodied on the bus angered him at the same time as it inspired him to join the struggle against segregation. He states that, while he was riding a bus in 1961, two freedom riders boarded. He continues, “The white woman sat in the back and the black man sat in the front… he come out bloody as hell… [police] arrested both of them…so now I’m really mad. You ask me why I got in the movement?, and I’m telling ya.”\textsuperscript{24} Muhammad’s perspective highlights how the efforts by youth were gaining momentum at the beginning of the decade. College students constituted a


\textsuperscript{23}National Archives, https://www.archives.gov/research/african-americans/black-power/sncc

significant part of the movement. They contributed heavily to lunch-counter sit-ins, rallying the New Left, and inspiring other youth to take action.\textsuperscript{25}

In addition to the students' motivation to protest on their own as a result of national events, as well as inspiration from older students' activism, there was a third generational tier of influence. Adult activists made a concerted effort to involve children into the movement. One important connection between adult activists and the 1963 children protestors came about after Martin Luther King Jr.'s failure to accomplish the goal of ending segregation in Albany, Georgia. After this defeat in 1962, King knew that it would be essential to, first, take the movement to Birmingham because, next to Mississippi, it was one of the most deeply segregated places in the South\textsuperscript{26}; and second, to reassess their approach to the protest. As a result, King developed Project C as a new strategy to further the goal of integration. It was through this improved approach that the role of children in the movement was introduced.

The new strategy was made up of three components. It aimed to first, weaken segregation throughout the south by weakening it in Birmingham; second, to mobilize Northern support; and, finally, to gain President John F. Kennedy’s attention to pressure him to pass a civil rights act. King- along with fellow SCLC members, Ralph David Abernathy, Wyatt Tee Walker, and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth- created a detailed plan for Project C. Their approach included fundraising, creating maps between meeting locations, nonviolent training programs, as well as the strategy for the actual day the protests began. At the same time, Reverend James Lawson began hosting non-violent direct action training sessions to prepare protestors.\textsuperscript{27} A component of

\textsuperscript{26} Cohen and Snyder, p 2.
their strategy was to fill the local jails with protestors in order to overwhelm the system and redirect government funds towards their detainment. In addition, they planned to boycott downtown shopping centers. Protestors not only had to be willing to be arrested, but ready, as it would ultimately achieve the goal of the plan. Project C aimed to be an improved approach to the mission in Birmingham that would accomplish what had failed in Albany, Georgia.

However, despite the effort by SCLC members to improve their approach, Project C proved to be yet another failure for the organization. On April 2nd, 1962, when the volunteers were deployed to march to the lunch-counters where they would end their protest with a sit-in, the goal at the end of the day was to flood the Birmingham jails with protestors arrested at the lunch-counters. To the protestors' surprise, only one lunch-counter reacted by calling the police, while the remaining four merely turned off the lights and closed for the day. 100 protesters were arrested and the efforts made back-page news. The *New York Times* even reported on the event as “untimely.”28 This blatant disregard on the part of the American public signaled a deeper issue to the activists than being arrested. If the American public did not care, then how would activists be able to raise and mobilize the attention needed to pass a civil rights act? To exacerbate the issue, many adults could not sustain their involvement in the protests because extended time away from work and an arrest record jeopardized their employment, and therefore the ability to keep meals on the table and a roof over their children’s heads. Additionally, even if an adult could afford the sacrificed time and energy, bail was increased from three hundred to two thousand five hundred dollars. Not even the SCLC could keep up with the amount due through the funds they had raised in preparation.29

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29 Woodhouse, p 105.
After this second failed attempt, King turned to the SCLC’s Director of Direct Action and of Nonviolent Education James Bevel and Diane Nash for their expertise in nonviolent protest. In their discussion, Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and James Bevel posed the idea of involving children in the movement. Without the risk of being fired from a job, and with the social leverage of their age, filling the movement’s ranks with children presented the perfect opportunity for sustained protest. With their combined support of the SCLC and SNCC, Dr. King, Bevel, and Reverend Shuttlesworth pushed to recruit young students into nonviolent training programs.

In the lead-up to the march, Reverend Shuttlesworth distributed hundreds of fliers to local Black high schools to gain their attention and potentially, their support. In addition to fliers, students were recruited and invited to watch a film about the Nashville sit in movement. This was a strategy to introduce them to the kind of work they would be doing and familiarize them with nonviolent protest.

Although the Children’s Crusade became famous for its remarkable outpouring of voluntary support from young students, some as young as five years old, members of the SCLC, Dr. King in particular, originally intended only to recruit college age students, who had caught their attention through the sit-in protests. Dr. King had previous experience working with this demographic alongside Ella Baker during the formation of SNCC. The protest leaders would have been familiar and comfortable working with older students through their previous work. By expanding the breadth of who was invited to protest, the adults attempted to create boundaries
about who was allowed to be involved. For safety reasons, Dr. King reportedly drew the line for the youngest participants allowed in the nonviolent protest at fourteen years old.

However, Bevel and William Dothard believed in the ability and potential of young student activists and made efforts to rally them by speaking at elementary schools.\textsuperscript{34} On top of these talks given at schools, the preachers also gave sermons at night at the 16th Street Baptist Church that many young people attended. The night before “D-Day”, many children stood when King asked who was willing to be arrested. King had doubts and pressed the students further to challenge if they believed they were ready. However, no one waivered. The fierce willingness to participate dispelled King’s doubts. This fierce willingness that many young people possessed is demonstrated in the words of young activist, Audrey Faye Hendricks, when she stated “‘I want to go to jail.”’\textsuperscript{35}

In addition, even some parents supported the childrens’ involvement in the SCLC’s resistance efforts. Many children in Birmingham lived in households that were in some way involved with the movement. Audrey Faye Hendricks is one prime example of this. It can be argued that her involvement in the Children’s Crusade was inevitable because of the extensive involvement her parents had with the ACMHR and the SCLC during the late 1950s. She recalls, “‘Mike (that’s what we called Martin), Andy, and Fred- they’d stand in the kitchen while my mother made dinner…” Standing in the kitchen with civil rights icons such as Dr. King and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, as well as her politically active parents, immersed young Hendricks into the world of resistance. Later on historian Cynthia Levinson states how Hendricks recalls that, “she [Hendricks] would no longer just attend meetings. Somehow, she

\textsuperscript{34} Levinson, 69.
\textsuperscript{35} Levinson, 69.
would act on her own.”

Despite this decree of independence from adult support, the politically active atmosphere Hendricks was steeped in during the early years of her childhood most certainly contributed heavily to this. The intentional organization by her parents and other adult activists would have provided her with the resources, emotional support, and role modeling to act on this sentiment.

These different generational factors combined presented both the motivation to resist on the part of young people and the support by adults which helped to organize the actions students could take. Leading up to the protest, the students had reason to take action by their own volition, yet encouragement and inspiration by a mix of elders. Adults’ support for the students provided kindling for a fire that had already started to burn in the hearts of the students. As author Cynthia Levinson states, Dr. King and other civil rights leader’s sermons “were uplifting and their delivery energetic… As the ministers called out their message, congregants responded loudly with their approval.”

Former students, such as Audrey Faye Hendricks, remember being captivated and inspired by the sermons. Between the racial oppression they had experienced firsthand, that which they had witnessed enacted upon other children their age, and the influence of actions taken by older students, a desire to push for change was already on the mind of younger students. It was through the encouragement and resources provided by the adult activists that allowed the children to run with the motivation they already possessed.

Over a decade later and an ocean away, South African students were on a similar trajectory to protest racialized structures of oppression as the students of the Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama. At the same time as the height of the Civil Rights movement in the

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36 Levinson, 11.
37 Levinson, 40.
38 Levinson, 7.
U.S., the 1960s in South Africa ushered in what would be known as “high Apartheid”. This era, peaking in the late 1960s, was the final stage of implementing the segregationist policies by the Apartheid government. Following a decade of nonviolent protest by adults throughout the 1950s, multiple blows to people’s efforts took place. Major events included the 1960 Sharpeville Masacre, and resultant banning of the ANC and the PAC, as well as the countless arrests and exiles of main civil rights leaders due to the 1967 Terrorism Act. As a result, the morale to protest the racist regime plummeted among Black South Africans. This low point marked a time when direct action through protest was scarce and the white minority witnessed unprecedented economic and political growth.

Two factors fostered the gradual rebuilding of Black South Africans' morale and readiness for direct protest. Throughout the 1960s, despite the general collapse of hope and inspiration, younger generations growing frustration, as well as some adults continued subtle resistance contributed to the regrowth of resistance. The combination of these two factors lay the groundwork for the years of protest that would ensue in the 1970s. Both the “passive” action taken by parents and the growing organization by college students through SASO put into motion events which would lead to the Soweto Uprising.

Although protest was low following the events of the 1960s, it was not completely dormant throughout this decade and into the 1970s. Parents as well as teachers in townships resisted the implementation of Afrikaans into secondary education by writing appeals during 1975 to show how popular opinion disagreed with the new policy. Despite these efforts, the bureaucratic system in place was not designed for accountability on the part of the government.

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39 Nieftagodien, 9.
40 Nieftagodien, 59.
It was merely a smokescreen which gave the illusion that concerns would be attended to. Government officials dismissed the appeals and the efforts to work within the system against Afrikaans fell through. Instances such as this one display parent’s efforts to prevent racist policies from further deteriorating their children’s education. Yet, not much could be done through operating within the system and morale was too low for anger to gain enough traction to turn into protests.\(^{41}\)

Despite this failure, parents’ anti-Apartheid sentiment was present within parents. However, because many adults were afraid of the response youth protests would be met with, there was not much explicit support on the part of parents to encourage their children into action. A testimony by Sibongile Mkhabela, a prominent political activist and student organizer for the Student Representative Council (SRC) and South African Student Movement (SASM), captures this fear. Mkhabela remembers her father’s reaction to her resistance efforts in 1976, “I saw Baba toss and turn on his bed in grave distress. He was not going to scold me. He was not angry, but scared.”\(^{42}\) This fear indicates the understanding that parents had of the severe consequences protesting posed. She continues, “For the first time in my life Baba gave me a full political lecture. He talked, almost to himself, about the brutality of white people and the failed struggles of black people.” “The failed struggles of black people,” here indicates the scarring memory parents had of a time that came before their children. Although Mkhabela’s testimony does not indicate the specific events referenced by her father, given the timeframe of his age and the aforementioned dates, it can be inferred that he was possibly recalling the Sharpeville massacre.

\(^{41}\) Nieftagodien, 64.

These failed protests brought pain and strife upon the Black community which lingered, unresolved. Mkhabela’s father’s “tossing and turning”, and deep discomfort highlight the lingering nature of these traumatic events. Her description of his reserved nature, his immigrant status, and single-fatherhood, indicate that he was most likely not politically active, and therefore not at the massacre himself.\footnote{Interviewer N/A, "LRC Oral History Project," Interview, Historical Papers, Wits University, Last modified 2008, http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/inventories/inv_pdf/AG3298/AG3298-1-111-text.pdf, p 9.} However, he seems affected because these were events that collectively hurt the Black community of his generation. The fact that he does not scold her despite his discomfort speaks to his fear for his daughter’s safety and his ultimate goal to keep her out of harm’s way.

Additionally, some Black South African parents’ reaction to protest indicated this similarly informed fear, yet acknowledged and passively supported their children’s yearning to resist. One such example is offered in an account of an exchange in 1968 between Mark Mathabane and his mother after learning about the death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. When Mathabane asks about the American civil rights icon, his mother explains to him:

‘This ‘King’ you’re asking about… he was a God-fearing man who died fighting to set his people free. To get them equal rights,’ to which Mathabane responds, ‘Has anyone since fought for any rights’ referring to the rights of Black South Africans. ‘No,’ answers his mother. ‘Why?’, asks Mathabane. ‘Because everyone is afraid… afraid of dying… now stop asking questions and go do your homework.’ He continues, ‘When I grow up, Mama, I’ll fight for my rights… My mother stared at me, but said nothing.’\footnote{Mathabane, p 158.}
His mother does not explicitly scold him, yet her direct eye contact and silence indicate a sense of withheld acknowledgement of his concerns, as well as an apprehension for her son’s courageous assertion. This reaction aligns with that of Mkhabela’s father. Despite both parents' reservations, their reactions demonstrate a recognition that the next generation was developing a new mentality on the front of civil rights; one that was reinvigorated by the youth’s desire to resist rather than subsist under segregation.

Furthermore, as Mathabane recounts in his memoir, many mothers in particular encouraged their children to stay in school.\textsuperscript{45} A formal education was an important act of resistance because it placed children into the environment where they would explore political thought, and consequently pursue political action. Often sending their children to school was anything but an easy task; Traditional customs did not usually encourage government-sponsored education, and fees and documentation were major obstacles for many families. In his memoir, Mathabane describes the conflict that took place in his household between his mother and father over the decision to send him to school. According to his father, the education he would receive was that of the white man and was of no use to him, as there were traditional teachings and ways of life that awaited him. His mother adamantly disagreed and made the choice to send him, despite the financial strain and risk for her own safety within the household. When young Mathabane asked her why she made this choice she responded, “I want you to have a future, child… school is the only means…”\textsuperscript{46} Despite the limitations of the education that Black South African children had access to, such as overcrowded classrooms and few learning materials, Mathabane’s mother describes how, “if you can read and write you will be better off than those

\begin{footnotes}
\item[45] Mathabane, p 125.
\end{footnotes}
who can’t.” By attempting to at least give her some this advantage, Mathabane’s mother did what many hoped they could also do: give their children the tools to create a life with more opportunity than their own. His mother’s attitude was one that contradicted the aims of the apartheid government, because she overcame obstacles in the way of his education and armed him with the knowledge that academic persistence could give him a better life than what would otherwise be possible. This mentality fueled what made schools predisposed for dissent, as it encouraged students to be in an environment where anti-Apartheid thought and action could gain traction. The stories offered by Mathabane and Mkhabela demonstrate how adult and parental involvement was present to some degree, but was often scarce.

Additionally, in the decade leading up to the Soweto Uprising, college students began to organize at their respective universities around anti-Apartheid thought. In 1968, the formation of the South African Student Organization (SASO) contributed greatly to the establishment of a political presence by young people. One of SASO’s main organizational strategies to widen their network was to connect with other Black universities across South Africa. One such connection was with the University of the North, otherwise known as Turfloop. Part of what allowed SASO to establish itself so effectively, especially on this campus, was the apartheid governments purposeful blind eye to their organization. Historian Anne Heffernan asserts that, because SASO was by-and-for Black students, in the eyes of the government officials, it aligned neatly with their ideology of separate development. In tandem with their belief of racial inferiority, the government initially saw no reason to dissolve the organization.47

However, over time it became clear that the power that the collective student network possessed was far greater than what the Apartheid government had initially assumed. In 1972, just four years after SASO’s establishment, college student activist and president of the Student Representative Council at Turfloop, Okgopotse Tiro, presented a graduation speech in which he openly criticised the Apartheid government. In his speech he stated, “The magic story of human achievement gives irrefutable proof that as soon as nationalism is awakened among the intelligentsia, it becomes the vanguard in the struggle against alien rule.”

Tiro’s indication of the Apartheid government as “alien rule” highlights the political dissent at the heart of SASO. Additionally, “vanguard against” signals to the collectivization of students against alien rule underscores the power possessed by students that the government feared. Considering his statements inflammatory and unacceptable, government officials responded immediately and harshly. Every student and faculty member was expelled from the University, and only those who were most politically passive were readmitted.

As a result, many student activists, including Tiro himself, had to find other avenues through which to express their political dissent. Teaching was a natural alternative and in the years following this incident, many previous SRC and SASO members from the University of the North became secondary teachers in townships, such as Soweto. This chain reaction moved the attitude of politically active college students into secondary schools in townships and thus created student activists’ cross-generational connections. The relocation of student activists also signaled a shift from students congregating in the rural university, and into the bustling city

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49 Heffernan, p 52.
hub of Soweto just outside of Johannesburg. Because Soweto had a higher concentration of students and an issue with the overcrowding of schools, these new teachers were bringing their activism into an already more “volatile” setting.

These cross-generational student connections served as an important support for student organization, especially within Soweto. One example of this teacher to student connection was the case of Tiro and Mashinini. After his expulsion from Turfloop, Tiro travelled to Soweto where he became a history teacher at Morris Isaacson High School. During his time here, he noticed Mashinini’s propensity for school and learning and decided to take him under his wing. This connection introduced Mashinini to important political thought happening in the Black community in South Africa during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including the ideas of Black Consciousness and relevant history about African anti-colonial struggles more broadly. In addition to these materials relevant to South Africa, Tiro also provided Mashinini with readings about the history of slavery in the United States as well as content relevant to the U.S. Civil Rights movement. I will investigate this international connection between the two countries more in the next chapter. Tiro was a gateway for Mashinini into the intellectual sphere of activism and served as an academic mentor for him in this way. As cited in an interview with Soweto teacher, Fanyana Mazibuko recalls that the day of the Uprising Mashinini:

“suddenly… [yet] politely asked to say something,” during the morning assembly, “and we did expect that would happen, from there he just shouted ‘Amandla’... Then he walked out of the school yard and was followed by the students and that was the beginning… thereafter schooling at Morris Isaacson was never the same again.”

50 Fanyana Mazibuko. Interview. N/A, South Africa. N/A. Very little information about the interview was included in the archive. Inferring from the topic of the interview and from that time frame, this interview was probably recorded in Soweto during the 1980s or 90s. Part two, minute 8.
Tiro’s influence is significant because Mashinini went on to be one of the most notable student activist leaders in Soweto. By providing Mashinini with outside reading materials, Tiro armed the young student activist with knowledge to motivate him and inform his later efforts.

Although teachers played a vital role by encouraging and challenging the students’ political thinking, the youth of Soweto primarily organized themselves independently of adult intervention. Examples of this can be seen from the aforementioned student leaders, Sibongile Mkhabela and Teboho (Tsitsi) Mashinini. In the words of Mkhabela, “The simmering tension in the schools in early June of 1976 would have alerted anyone to the danger inherent in the spirit of rebellion among the students.” “Simmering tension” gestures towards the motivation beginning to well up in students that needed to be expressed. Similarly to the organization of SASO on the college level eight years earlier, this frustration fueled the secondary school student’s efforts across the township, organizing themselves into two main student bodies: NAYO and SASM.

Together, SASO and ASM decided it was important to unite high school students across South Africa. Through this collaboration, SASM was launched in 1973, just three years before the Uprising. Young SASM barely survived the government surveillance and harassment in its first couple of years. However, it was able to succeed in Soweto; And in tandem with the hold of the Black Consciousness Movement, students kept alive their political discussions. They did this through meetings disguised as after school study groups and community activity groups. As Nieftagodien says, “SASM may have been organisationally weak, but its survival in the face of

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52 Mkhabela, p 58.
53 Nieftagodien, p 44.
mounting repression was testimony to the commitment of its members. Moreover, it consisted of politically aware senior students, who commanded respect in the secondary and high schools.” Nieftagodien's assertion about senior students’ secret meetings and “commanding respect” in secondary schools highlights how students in the face of repeated obstacles, rallied younger students to keep their efforts alive.

Furthermore, this student-to-student reliance can be seen in meetings leading up to the Soweto Uprising. On Sunday, June 13th, just three days before the Uprising, students from all over Soweto, associated with SASM through their various schools, gathered together at the Donaldson Community Centre in Soweto. Their agenda was to create a solidified action plan for how to stand in solidarity with neighboring schools in their recent protests. Because the protests were against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, this was something students from all schools were similarly affected by. During the meeting, student leaders of the secondary schools called upon younger students of the junior secondary schools to join as well.\(^{54}\) Sibonglie Mkhabela was present at this meeting and recalls that,

\begin{quote}
Tempers flared high at the meeting, for we all felt it was time we took action ... Pupils shared stories about cruel police activities in their school. In some schools there was clear collaboration between members of staff and the police, but most school administrators had remained supportive of their pupils ... Students did not hate school; this I felt in my bones and soul. Rather, school was being taken away from Black pupils.\(^{55}\)
\end{quote}

This meeting demonstrates the leadership roles youth took upon themselves to organize and continue the peaceful protests. Their actions also show how, despite their own youth, they

\(^{54}\) Nieftagodien, p 79.
\(^{55}\) Mkhabela, p 49.
became leaders for the children under them. Also, student’s cross-institutional work displays their motivation and agency in keeping connections with each other alive.

This example demonstrates how, although some parents and teachers encouraged students along the way, the students' frustrations had mounted to a point at which they were ready to act upon their own volition. Seth Mazibuko, a high school teacher in Soweto during the 1970s, recalls that the students were poised to act on their own and rebelled against staff who did not act in solidarity with the students' efforts. In his interview, he recalls that when the principal negated students demands to ban Afrikaans, the students reacted by boycotting class.\footnote{Seth Mazibuko. Interview. N/A, South Africa. N/A. Very little information about the interview was included in the archive. Inferring from the topic of the interview and from that time frame, this interview was probably recorded in Soweto during the 1980s or 90s. Part three, minute 2:25-5:30.} This also indicates generational discord between older and younger teachers. As mentioned before, many younger teachers took it upon themselves to encourage student’s efforts, partly as a result of their own experiences with activism in school. Older generations of teachers may have been informed by similar events and experiences as the student’s parents; therefore harboring disagreements with the student’s actions.

Additionally, Mazibuko’s statement is supported by Mathabane’s account of his experience participating in a solidarity protest in Alexandria, a nearby Township located outside of Johannesburg, the day after the Soweto Uprising. He recalls that in the morning as the students were gathered in the school yard, the group collectively marched away and into the street despite the best efforts of some faculty to prevent them. He recalls that the principal “authoritatively” bellowed, “‘There will be no demonstrations in this school…’ [He] tried to restore order but was ignored.”\footnote{Mathabane, p 261.} The momentum of the movement overrode the efforts of
outspoken skeptics who lay witness to the actions of the students. In tandem with Mhkabela’s comment, it becomes clear that the “high-flared tempers” were to become an unstoppable force.

The varying levels of intentional adult organization between the two cases demonstrate the nuance of adult to student involvement leading up to the two marches. Although the media coverage afterwards swung between blaming children for their disruptive, spontaneous riots, such as with Bull Connor in Birmingham, to political organizations laying claims to the actions of the students, such as with the ANC in South Africa. Looking at these two histories together we can see that adult involvement and student independence were both major components of what gave rise to the marches. However, in the United States, the heavy involvement of the SCLC and the ACMHR leaders in the organization of the Children’s Crusade demonstrate the formalized support network available to students. The additional support that student’s received from their politically active parents created an environment in which their desire to resist could flourish. Conversely in South Africa, although there were vital teacher to student ties and some organizational encouragement from SASO, students in general leaned most heavily upon the organizational support they provided for themselves. Their elders provided insights and elevated their political thinking through providing readings and engaging in dialogues with the students. However, in the actual lead up to the event, it was student activists who took charge to organize, rally, and lead each other and younger students. This more intentional and formalized support on the part of adults in the United States provided leaders that students could look up to on a daily basis. In South Africa, because of the downturn in adult activism, this was not a resource that students had as immediately available. In the next chapter, there will be an exploration of the international influences that children drew upon to serve as inspiration for their movement.
Chapter Two: International Ideological Influence on the Marches

Investigating the various levels of generational involvement in the development of the marches reveals how the students’ personal and wider communities affected their protesting. More broadly, individuals across the African diaspora were engaged in dialogues about race and revolution, which affected the actions of the students. Speeches by icons such as Malcom X, and solidarity protests pertaining to racial identity, rights, and justice are prime examples of what constituted this international dialogue. Everyday people and activists alike engaged in international communication about themes such as anti-Black racism, colonialism, and the African diaspora. This communication happened through media, such as popular music, newspapers and magazines, and radio broadcasts. As a result, information regarding civil rights icons and resistance in both countries, disseminated within both South Africa and the United States.

South Africa, in particular, was influenced heavily by American political and cultural production during the 1960s. These American reference points were apparent in South African student activists’ ideological leanings, speeches, and even attire. Meanwhile, in the United States there was an emerging PanAfrican sensibility amongst activists and Black Americans in general. However, the children protestors of 1963 in the United States did not make a strong reference to South Africa in particular. External versus internal influence is one of the main factors in where activists gathered their inspiration during the 1960s and 1970s. In South Africa the activists’ gaze was oriented more externally to the United States, while U.S. activists were oriented more internally. This internal versus external lens affected the political ideas to which the students were exposed and therefore the rhetoric and motivation behind their respective organizing. I
argue that because South African students had less formal and intentional guidance from adults, it was more useful to them to look to the United States for models of political leadership, in contrast to the students in the United States who had the combined factors of being at the epicenter of political change and cultural production, as well as with the advantage of heavy adult involvement. They therefore had less reason to look externally for inspiration.

In the decades between 1890 and 1940, long before the students who protested were even a thought, a relationship between South Africa and the U.S. emerged based on the common goal of Black empowerment. This relationship was built on common goals, yet was imbalanced. Historian Robert Vinson argues that through Black Americans' socio-economic advancements, athletic accomplishments, as well as cultural production in these decades, South African people came to see the United States as more advanced in their struggle against racial oppression. As a result, South Africans disproportionately took inspiration from the United States and ideologies from American thinkers, such as Marcus Garvey, Booker T. Washington, and WEB DuBois.

Although there was significantly more legal and political advancement in the U.S. by the mid-Twentieth century, Vinson attributes South Africa’s idealization of the situation in the U.S. to the slavery-to-freedom narrative. Coming off of the Civil War, the slavery-to-freedom narrative was promoted by the U.S. government and gained traction amongst the public. This narrative shifted as it travelled outside of the U.S. The intra-United States slavery-to-freedom narrative portrays the idea that the United States needed to have slavery in order to have freedom, which erases the history, lack of reconciliation, and continued disparities as a result of slavery. The slavery-to-freedom narrative in South Africa was predicated on the idea that

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because Black people were able to “free themselves” in the United States, they would help to save South Africans from their plight. This shows how closely American events and politics around race affected South Africans. It also demonstrates the power dynamic created as a result of holding the situation in the U.S. on a pedestal.

Vinson continues to say how this inspiration went to the extent that some Black South Africans, beginning after 1900, began to view Black Americans as a metaphorical Moses that would lead them out of the tyranny of Apartheid. Through this idealization, a mythology of perfect citizenship and ultimate freedom in the U.S. was mobilized during the 1920s as a form of inspiration for South African people and activists. He states:

Metaphorically, the American N*gro, like Marcus Garvey, became a modern-day Moses who would come to lead Africans out of a tyrannical Egypt and virtual slavery to the Promised Land of personal and political equality, education and upward mobility. It was a dream that inspired and informed future leaders of South Africa, developed a global Black consciousness, and spurred action that made the end of Apartheid possible. But that dream also led to fantasy, despair, and disillusionment… when Americans did not come to save them in the late Nineteenth- and early Twentieth-century Atlantic world.

Vinson emphasizes how Black South Africans’ idealization of African American people’s position within society happened mostly after peak moments of historical hardship and times of disillusionment. For example, a group of Black American singers, the Virginia Jubilee Singers, arrived in South Africa in 1890, a time when racial segregation intensified in the country. Their arrival accelerated the “up from slavery” narrative because it spread an image of positive growth for the Black American community in the post-Civil War United States. This theme is important for thinking about the students later on because the time period in which they were living was also a time of peak disillusionment. As Vinson states, the narrative of

\[59\text{Vinson, p 9.}\]
\[60\text{Vinson, p 3.}\]
\[61\text{Vinson, p 32.}\]
slavery-to-freedom “inspired and informed” direct action amongst South African activists and leaders. However, he also uses the terms “fantasy” and “disillusionment” which acknowledges that to a certain extent, much of this idea was a figment of a utopian imagination, while the reality of Black Americans and their ability to “save” South Africans from racialized oppression was not what some imagined it to be.

Coming into the time of post 1960s and early 1970s South Africa, the direct reference to American thinkers and an idealized story of the experience of Black people in the United States continued to inform Black South Africans’ aspirations during their struggle against Apartheid. This idealization is highlighted in Mark Mathabane’s memoir, which recalls learning about famed boxer, Muhammad Ali for the first time when he was a young teenager in the 1970s, living in Alexandra township outside of the city center of Johannesburg. Because the boys neither mention the name of the other boxer nor where they heard the story, it can be inferred that this story was relayed to them by word-of-mouth, losing specificity along the way. Additionally, there is no specific mention of who Ali’s opponent was. However, when the boys inquire further about the sport, the local boxing coach mentions the name Max Schleming. This is significant because Schmeling lost to famous Black American boxer, Joe Lewis, in 1936. This double reference to the success of these Black American athletes shows the prolonged attention to American events; Mathabane recalls the excitement of his friend when he ran up to him declaring,

“Haven’t you heard?” he bulged his eyes at me. “Heard what?” “...about the boxing fight, you fool,” the boy said importantly. “The big boxing fight that took place in America yesterday.” America, what strange name is that?

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“Who fought who?” I said eagerly
“Ali,” the boy said, jabbing his fists high in the air as a sign of victory. “Ali,” he repeated, “a black man. As black as all the people you see around here… He beat to death a white man.”
“Hunh! I gasped in disbelief. “A black man beat a white man to death? Where, in this country?”
“No, fool. Not here, in America.”
“Where’s that?”
“Overseas.”
“Where overseas?”
“I don’t know.”

The distortion of the story and valorizing of Ali demonstrates Vinson’s claims about South African people looking to American athletes. The exaggeration of Ali “killing” a white man displays the metaphor of Ali’s win as defeating a white man and therefore defeating the odds stacked against Black people. Although the news did eventually travel to the township, the story was warped along the way in a particular direction - one that transmitted outsized power to the African American athletic hero. Given the exaggerations, people seemed to have changed the story to have it fit what they wanted to hear.

Furthermore, Mathabane goes on to ask the boy, “Where is America?”, to which he replies, “I don’t know”. Although the boys are cued into America’s racial politics, the young boys do not have a clear idea of where the country is geographically located. The gap in the boys’ knowledge, in tandem with their over exaggeration of the events that took place, reveals how America was very much alive in the imagination of South African people and was interpreted according to the idealized outlook people had on the situation of the U.S.

In addition to this mobilization of a mythology about American freedom, the ideas of Marcus Garvey, Book T Washington, and WEB DuBois became widespread in South Africa.

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63 Mathabane, p 152.
Garveyism in particular took hold in South Africa during the early Twentieth century. The influence of these American thinkers can be seen in how South African Garveyites adopted and interpreted the ideology. As Vinson states, “The result was many diffuse and decentralized South African Garveyism, including many forms that would have been unknown and unrecognizable to Garvey himself.” “Unknown” and “unrecognizable” indicate the extent to which South African activists integrated the ideology into their own political and ideological framework. The detachment from the original source shows the integral nature of American inspiration to South African freedom movements and political thinking.

Mark Mathabane’s memory of American influence supports Vinson’s analysis. He recalls learning of Americans who were doctors, lawyers, musicians, and all of whom identified as Black. Seeing Black Americans pursue successful careers in a variety of fields surprised him in comparison to the accomplishments of Black South Africans during his lifetime. Mathabane remembers, “I came across these names in newspapers, magazines and books. On reading of their accomplishments, I found it beyond me to believe that they, whom history depicted as descendants of slaves, slaves taken from the very Africa in which I lived, could have achieved so much.” The phrase, “I found it beyond me,” demonstrates Mathabane’s surprise and awe-inspired outlook on the situation of Black Americans. Because he lists the top of the top achievers, it becomes apparent that his outlook is informed by a select few people’s experiences, and therefore negates the more general lived experiences of the Black American public at large. This more general experience would not have reflected the idealized version that was impressed upon young Mathabane.

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64 Vinson, p 3.  
65 Mathabane, p 234.
Magaziner, in his book, the *Law and the Prophets* further articulates the extent to which South African activists, and students in particular, were inspired by Black American thinkers continuing on into the 1970s. Magaziner traces the history of the heavy and direct references made by South African students to activist leaders internationally, and particularly in the U.S. He even mentions the borrowing of phrases from speeches at times bordered on plagiarism. However, plagiarism was not legally set in the same way it is now. Magaziner states, “As with Biko… SASO activists did not exactly respect copyright. They often wrote…‘in and out’ of sources…But it was not so simple… activists copied, but they also translated: they read words from one context and wrote them into their own.”

SASO activists writing “in” sources demonstrates how students in the 60s and 70s were doing what their predecessors had, which was to mimic the American ideals that applied to them. Writing “out” of sources shows how the students changed ideas to help them animate their resistance according to their specific context.

One specific example of this is SASO’s borrowing of language from the Black Power movement. Magaziner states how SASO activists were inspired by Black Power, but chose the term “consciousness… to describe their project…” because, as “Biko picked his way through books, including Carmichael's; surely… he had noted the role that consciousness played there. ‘A new consciousness among black people,’ Hamilton and Carmichael wrote, ‘will make it possible for us to proceed.’” Magaziner goes on to draw the distinctions between the progress against racial oppression in the two countries, as well as the differences in their democracies which prompted these terminology distinctions to be drawn. However, Magaziner makes it clear the inspiration student activists in the early 1970s took from American sources.

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67 Magaziner, p 50.
Furthermore, Onkgopotse Tiro’s infamous 1972 graduation speech provides a notable example of Black South African student activist’s mobilization of this idealized version of the Black American freedom. To emphasize the point of why Black South Africans deserved equal education, Tiro invokes the mythology of perfect equality in the United States education system.

In America there is nothing like N*gro Education, Red Indian Education, and White American Education. They have American Education common to all Americans. But in South Africa, we have Bantu Education, Indian Education, Coloured Education and European Education. We do not have a system of education common to all South Africans. What is there in European Education which is not good for the African? We want a system of education which is common to all South Africans.  

Given the historical context of the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 and the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race amongst other identity markers, it can be inferred that these are progressive policy changes to which he is referring. The busing of Black children to white schools, as an attempt to end segregation as began in the beginning of the 1970s. The new policies seem to have given the impression that segregation had ended in the United States and racial equality had been achieved- particularly in schools. In addition, because the civil rights act was passed, this was a step in the right direction which South Africa had yet to achieve. However, the reality of white supremacist counter-protests and difficulties of implementing desegregation in the U.S. made this positive change a slow, uphill battle, which continues today. The difference in the reality of the situation and the way it was portrayed in Tiro’s speech, with the language of “there is nothing like” inequalities in school and “common to all” highlight how students mobilized this mythology to further their own movement.

68 Tiro, p 1.
The students’ independent reference to the United States is also demonstrated through the cultural influence that was present in their sense of fashion. According to South Africa History Online, “As a teenager of his time,” Mashinini, “preferred African-American fashions, [and was] especially drawn to hippie culture. He sported an Afro and wore bell-bottomed trousers and high-heeled shoes, and had a vibrant social life.”70 His specific uses of American styles, such as wearing his hair in an afro and wearing bellbottoms, demonstrate how the Black South African youth of the 1970s were kept up with American cultural trends in addition to their politics. His vibrant social life and the fact that he was one of the main student organizers in Soweto demonstrates how the trends that he participated in were popular more broadly.

Because the timeframe that Magaziner analyzes is about twenty years after the end of Vinson’s timeframe, this demonstrates the prolonged influence that American political thought had on South Africa during the Twentieth century. The continuation of this American influence also denotes trans-generational communication, and therefore suggests that this was a deeply ingrained narrative. Although the students’ reference to the U.S. was not historically special in comparison to the generations before them, because they were living in a time of peak disillusionment, as Vinson describes it, students were able to pull on a well established idea of what freedom looked like in the U.S. to mobilize their own movement.

Moving back in time to the post-World War II United States, to consider the degree to which American students were similarly influenced by a flow of ideas and examples from South Africa, we see that the students participating in the civil rights movement did not draw inspiration specifically from South Africa in the way that later South African students did with

the United States. In general, activists in the United States did not look to South Africa for inspiration as much as they referenced PanAfricanism. Initially, it seemed that themes of American exceptionalism might be a reason for why South Africa fell into the periphery of American activists’ international outlook. However, historian Mark Malisa demonstrates how heavy references to PanAfricanism and not individual countries, seem to be related to Black Americans—especially politically active individuals—finding their within the African diaspora.\footnote{Malisa, p 101.}

However, the lack of inspiration drawn from South Africa did not mean that U.S. activists were completely disconnected from South African news. Following the work of transnational, PanAfricanist cultural historian Tyler Fleming, the story of Miriam Makeba’s initial embrace and then rejection by popular American audiences is illustrative. One example of American activists’ ties to a PanAfrican identity, as well as their cognizance of the happenings of Apartheid, is the union between South African jazz icon, Miriam Makeba and SNCC and Black Panther Party leader, Stokely Carmichael. Before their marriage in 1968, Makeba was accepted by the American public because they viewed her exile from South Africa with sympathy and were fascinated by her “exotic” language and beauty.\footnote{Tyler Fleming, "A marriage of Inconvenience: Miriam Makeba's Relationship with Stokely Carmichael and her Music Career in the United States," \textit{Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies} 17, no. 3 (May 16, 2016), \url{https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2016.1176720}, p 314.} After her connection with Harry Belafonte as her mentor, Makeba reached the top of the charts in the U.S. and gained national popularity. The American public’s tolerance of her and anti-Apartheid politics, during the early 1960s, stems mostly from the fact that it did not personally attack Americans. However, upon her union with Carmichael, which the couple tried to keep private, the American public turned on Makeba, accusing her of militancy and radicalism as the new “Mrs. Stokely Carmichael”. To their
audiences--conservatives and progressives alike-- the marriage was considered a marriage of the two movements: the U.S. civil rights movement and the anti-Apartheid struggle in South Africa. White Americans’ rejection of their union and fear of their politics reveal the hypocrisy and inability for self-reflexivity on the state of white supremacy present within the United States.

In addition, Makeba and Carmichael’s marriage speaks to U.S. civil rights activist’s orientation towards PanAfricanism because their relationship mirrors the one that existed between African and African American activists based on PanAfricanist ideals and solidarity for their mutual struggles. Because the couple traveled to Guinea and later settled there, American Civil Rights leader’s efforts to make connections with the continent are apparent. According to historian, Mark Malisa, part of U.S. activist’s connection to PanAfricanism demonstrates the desire to move away from the white western power structures that dominated the U.S. During the late 50’s and early 60’s, at the height of Makeba’s musical career and the emergence of Carmichael’s political presence, across the Atlantic, major decolonial events were happening in Africa. 1956 through 1958 ushered in the independence of Sudan, Morocco, Ghana, and Guinea, Makeba and Carmichael’s future home. Between 1960 and 1966, right before their marriage, thirty-four African nations, over half the continent, gained independence. This included Tanzania, with which the couple would later have connections. The independence of these nations would have alerted American activists to the decolonial struggles happening internationally, and put a spotlight on the American government’s racism that before 1963 had

73Fleming, p 313.
not yet passed a national civil rights act.\textsuperscript{75} In regards to the children of the 1963 march, this international dialogue was important because it was influencing the icons they would have looked up to. However, it did not play a major role in their actions.

Additionally, this move towards PanAfricanism by American activists is demonstrated in Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s ideological leanings. Historian Jeremy I. Levitt describes the PanAfricanist network that King became a part of by 1956. He states, “King boldly embraced his African heritage… [his] advocacy helped reshape and internationalize Black American distinctiveness, oppression, and claims to outside law, namely by refashioning international human rights law through the prism of PanAfricanism.”\textsuperscript{76} Levitt’s claim indicates that the esteemed civil rights leader did not just work on behalf of Black Americans’ rights, but kept a broader, more multicultural and international scope.

Furthermore, as historian Jelani Favors describes, in the United States in the 1970s, a division amongst college activists emerged that revealed this PanAfrican sensibility and an increased awareness of the events unfolding in South Africa. There were two major lines of thinking: one concerned more heavily with Black Power, Black Nationalism, and therefore PanAfricanism. The other veered away from PanAfricanism and took a Marxist approach, as students became increasingly aware of the intersectionality between race and class. Although South Africa and PanAfricanism did not have American student activists undivided attention by the early 1970s, some students still acted upon this international outlook. There was even a


commemoration for the Sharpeville massacre at the United Nations to stand in solidarity with Black South Africans.\textsuperscript{77}

During the late 1950s through early 1970s in the U.S., a PanAfrican sensibility emerged amongst adult and young activists alike. However, this global ideology did not cause them to orient towards South Africa for inspiration. The student’s in the U.S. had more inspiration to draw on internally and did not need to turn to specific countries to look up to for their movement. In contrast, students in South Africa had a much closer eye on the happenings of American politics and culture. An insight I offer for why South Africa was more directly focused on the United States relates to the conclusions found in chapter one. Students in South Africa had a lack of adult leadership in contrast to the students in the U.S. who had more intentional guidance from adult activists. As a result, students in South Africa would have had to turn elsewhere to gain direction from an energetic, motivated, and momentous source. Because civil rights leaders Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela were arrested in 1964, and the 1967 Terorrism Act weakened activists’ efforts, there became a void in leadership and inspiration within South Africa for the student’s of 1976 to look up to. A lot of times they ended up really looking at each other, such as with student leaders Teboho “Tseitsi” Mashinini or Sibongile Mkhabela, but also turned to the events happening internationally to model their efforts after.

Conclusion: A Wider Scope: We’ve Got a Job, Still

As presented by the first chapter, the students in the Childrens’ Crusade were more heavily mentored by Civil Rights activist adults than were the students of Soweto. This is not to discount the important contributions of teachers and mentors on the students’ organizing, however, this discrepancy displays the different roles that adult involvement can play in youth movements. The second chapter lays out the international influence that played a role in inspiring the students and their activism. Notably, South African students kept a focus on American events, icons, and ideas. This external influence signified a need for ideological leadership that South African students lacked as a result of sparse adult involvement. Meanwhile, in the U.S. there were fewer direct references to any one African country. At most, in regards to the children’s crusade, the pan-African beliefs of older activists would have influenced the political thinking of the students.

Viewing these two conclusions together, it seems that on some level, young activists sought out or at least accepted some form of activist leadership: something to look up to or aspire to emulate. Because there was such strong motivation on the part of young activists to stand up for their beliefs and to fight against the oppression they faced, they may have taken action regardless of leadership in the movement. However, the two conclusions in tandem reveal that there was a need for some sort of community involvement. This community involvement looked different across the two movements. In the United States, we can see how activist leaders went out of their way to reach children and involve them in the SCLC’s efforts. In South Africa, students were prompted by a medley of sources, including, relying on each other, gaining some teacher support, and observing the actions of Black activists and thinkers.
internationally—particularly those in the U.S. These examples indicate how students looked to
the world around them for inspiration and these tools of support, as well as channels through
which to funnel pre-existing impetus. They were the engine for change and these connections
helped to fuel their efforts.

Although the 1963 Children’s Crusade and the 1976 Soweto Uprising were watershed
moments in the future of civil rights in both the United States and South Africa, lasting public
memory of the events varies widely between the two countries. In South Africa, the Soweto
Uprising was seared onto national memory and the public has sought to honor the event ever
since the end of apartheid in 1994; so much so that historians have had to make a concerted
effort to include other moments of student resistance into literature. This is displayed in Noor
Nieftagodien’s book, *Students Must Rise: Youth Struggle in South Africa Before and Beyond
Soweto ’76*. In South Africa, there are museums and memorials to honor the students that
participated in the march, and June 16th has even become a national day of remembrance. As a
result, the Soweto Uprising remains present in South African peoples’ minds.

Meanwhile, in the United States, although there are important sites of memory about the
Children’s Crusade, such as in books and other published works; in general, public memory of
the march is less intense than that of the Soweto Uprising in South Africa. Public memory lacks
a specific emphasis on this event, as the memory of other major events has overshadowed it. For
example, there is a memorial dedicated specifically to Martin Luther King Jr. in Washington
D.C.; and in Birmingham, Alabama there is a museum dedicated to the Civil Rights movement in
general. However, the greatest resonance of the Children’s Crusade lies in the reproduction of
photographs from the event. The specificities of who the children were and what happened to
them have been neglected in public memory. As civil rights leader and U.S. congressman, John Lewis stated, “You see their faces today in history books and nobody knows their names. . . What ever happened to the little girl who was turned head over heels by those fire hoses?”

Along the lines of reinvigorating living memory of these events, many of the sources I found throughout the course of this project that recount the history of the marches are children's books. This is especially the case for the Children’s Crusade. Books such as We’ve Got a Job, A Dream of Freedom, and Remember are all geared towards a younger audience. The sources themselves are written by authors who either experienced the civil rights movement, lived in Birmingham, or had personal connections to the people who marched. Considering there are fewer public memorials for this event, it seems that there has been a concerted effort to pass along the story of children’s involvement in the civil rights movement to children today. These books seem to be an attempt by older generations to empower younger generations with information about youth activism and bring these events back into present public consciousness. This is evidenced by Levinson’s presentation of her book, We’ve Got a Job, to a group of elementary school children, as well as Toni Morrison’s use of the term “you” directed at the reader in her book, Remember. The same is true for the Soweto Uprising as there are books aimed at youth that have been published in recent years. One such example is, Open Earth and Black Roses, written by previous student activist Sibongile Mkhabela. The effort by adults to tell the story of children activists mirrors the findings of my first and second chapters because it highlights cross-generational attempts to influence childrens’ understanding of resistance. This similar effort is demonstrated by the actions of adults, such as Bevel, Audrey’s parents, and Tiro.

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78 Woodhouse, p 1.
Keeping in mind the different representations of these events, I would like to consider a quote by historian, Michel Ralph Trouillot. He states, “The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.” As Trouillot’s statement captures, understanding the events that have led up to the present is never redundant. In contrast to the Soweto Uprising, the Childrens’ Crusade has been under-remembered. This invisibility diminishes the power of this story to inform current generations about youth activists that have come before them.

The memory of past civil rights events are important because in recent years, there has been a surge in youth-driven protest in the United States and South Africa against racial oppression. Grassroots activist groups in the United States and South Africa, from Black Lives Matter, started in 2013, to Fees Must Fall, started in 2015. Amongst other goals, one of the Black Lives Matter movement’s main goals has been to combat police brutality, while Fees Must Fall’s main objective was to address unfair financial barriers to education.80 In addition, today, structures of racialized oppression still exist which continue to oppress students of color, and Black children in particular.81 Trouillots’ words and these children’s books together are a reminder that it is never redundant to continue to revisit important activist moments in order to understand what has contributed to the previous successes accomplished through civil rights movements, and to reflect on the ways these can be applied to current movements and inequalities..

81 Beverly Daniel Tatum, PhD, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?: And Other Conversations About Race, Basic Books, 2017, p 13.
Recently, the majority of civil rights movement organization has been decentralized and has happened through social media. This is a significant difference from how the Soweto Uprising and the Children’s Crusade were organized. Unlike the marches in the past, there are not the same type of dominant civil rights icons who have led and organized these movements. There are the creators of the Black Lives Matter slogan, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, as well as the student organizers of the Fees Must Fall hashtag. However, although these leaders set into motion these movements, by the nature of social media, the movements have been transformed by being passed along an extended network of individuals.

By establishing these two case studies, I offer a reflection on the importance of community connections in youth movements. As Nieftagodien describes, for the Soweto Uprising to be effective, “students had to mobilise en masse to send an unambiguous statement to the authorities about their rejection of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction.”\(^{82}\) The emphasis of “en masse” indicates that it was only through the connection between student activists and the collective effort which allowed for a successful outcome of the march. By looking at the Childrens’ Crusade and the Soweto Uprising in tandem with current youth activism, the theme of community support becomes clear. No matter the form that this community support takes, whether between students, with adults, or even in a broader international community as we have seen in the first and second chapter, it is a necessary component of achieving the goals of the civil rights movements. As Toni Morrison’s words, “This is about you,” convey, community connections are the backbone of honoring and further accomplishing change. This generates new questions about the role of community involvement in activism. I would like to investigate

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\(^{82}\) Nieftagodien, p 83.
further to what extent community involvement is necessary in the organization of movements and whether this is the case across other movements.

Additionally, given the resources, there are two other threads that I would pursue to continue my research. The first is: how can Fanon’s ideas of decolonization and destabilizing a power structure be applied to the two marches? I see potential in pursuing the idea of how students act as the catalyst for destabilizing power structures, which align with Fanon’s decolonial theory. The second: I would like to consider further the meaning of the freedom songs sung by the children in both movements. If I were to continue this work, I would like to interview Dr. Jan Willis, who I had the pleasure of speaking with, as well as my host family in Soweto.
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- Collection: Soweto Interviews, A2848-21, Description: Bongi Mkhabela

Very little information about the interviews was included in the archive. These interviews were most likely recorded in Soweto during the 1980s or 90s. I accessed them from the University of the Witwatersrand archives with the help of archivist Gabriele Mohale. All three were accessed January 15th, 2021.

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