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Freedom Now! 1968 as a Turning Point for Black American Student Activism¹

Patricia Hill Collins

Two weeks before Barack Obama was elected the 44th President of the United States, ex-Secretary of State Colin Powell gave an unprecedented endorsement of Obama's campaign: 'I think we need a *generational change*, and I think Senator Obama has *captured the feelings of the young people of America*, and is reaching out in a more diverse, inclusive way across our society' (Halperin 2008). Obama's decisive victory suggests that Colin Powell may be onto something. In particular, the 2008 Presidential campaign galvanized American youth as an increasingly visible political force in US politics and, in the case of the Obama campaign, pushed a multi-ethnic youth population as potential voters and workers to the forefront of the campaign itself.² When seen against the backdrop of the seeming political quiescence of American youth in pre-2004 Presidential campaigns, the resurgence of visible political activism among youth was startling.³ The November 2008 election not only was a watershed event for American electoral politics, it also may mark a substantial turning point in the political activism of American youth and the so-called Millennial Generation in particular.⁴

The year 1968 constituted a similar and significant turning point for youth activism. The year was a touchstone for the broader time period of the 1960s, one of massive social change that profoundly changed the dynamics of race, class, gender and sexuality in the United States.⁵ Most people who were young adults in 1968 can point to at least one event that occurred during that year that, for them, held great personal significance. Each month brought yet another major political event, with 1968 itself symbolizing a constellation of social and political changes that began in the 1950s and continued into the 1970s.⁶

Moreover, the events of the 1950s through the 1970s typically had young people at their core. For example, young people were the ones who faced police dogs and fire hoses during demonstrations of the 1963–1964 campaigns in Birmingham, Alabama. Their images on television shocked many viewers out of their complacency. While Martin Luther King, Jr, composed his famous ‘Letter from a Birmingham Jail,’ more than one thousand students skipped school on 2 May to join the demonstrations, in what would come to be called the Children’s Crusade. More than six hundred ended up in jail. The membership of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense, widely recognized as a radical Black Nationalist organization, was founded and maintained by youth. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale were 24 and 30 years old, respectively, when they founded the party in 1966 calling for the protection of African American neighbourhoods from police brutality. The Young Lords, a similar group, was founded by Latino youth.⁷ When Tom Hayden, a graduate student at the University of Michigan, launched Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1960, he helped catalyse an anti-war movement against the War in Vietnam that spread far beyond his home campus.⁸ Similarly, a heterogeneous constellation of young women, many of whom were politicized by their participation in the civil rights, anti-war, Black Power and Chicano social movements, launched a feminist movement that has catalysed widespread legal and social changes for women of all backgrounds. Campus organizing preceded the movement for gay and lesbian liberation, but the Stonewall Rebellion of June 1969 where gays and lesbians openly protested police actions gave a visible face to this hidden oppression.⁹ Collectively, youth from diverse backgrounds and through heterogeneous means took the risks. We enjoy the benefits.

The centrality of American youth in the events of 1968 is clear. Yet the varying interpretations given to youth political activism from this period are now emerging. Enough time has passed that we can begin to take stock of that era. Depending on your social location and/or your point of view, 1968 was the year that youth either lost their minds or came to their senses or accomplished both simultaneously.

In the US context, I sense an emerging stock story, one that recasts this broad, politicized and unruly array of youth-oriented social movement activities through a narrow lens of apolitical, simple adolescent rebellion. As caricatured in the media, the sixties’ youth apparently became mesmerized with drugs, free love and questionable politics; they were ungrateful hippies who disappointed their parents. From the perspective of White elites, this caricature held some validity. What does it mean

when your own children turn on you and question the very institutions that you worked so hard to preserve for them?

For White middle-class youth, getting into good schools and getting good jobs was not something that they might hope to earn some day – education and good jobs were class property, part of White middle-class entitlement to be handed down from one generation to the next.¹⁰ The task for elites lay in coming to terms with the seeming failure of the intergenerational transfer of wealth and power. For example, young middle-class White women became increasingly dissatisfied with attending college to find a mate with the hopes of settling peacefully in the suburbs. Their dissatisfaction with the 1950s catalysed their rebellion in the 1960s (Friedan 1963). Sociologist C. Wright Mills (1951) writes of the seemingly meaningless white-collar work that awaited young middle-class White men. In essence, some children of privilege used their education to seek greater freedoms within their race/class privilege (e.g., some strands of feminism and the identity politics of the gay/lesbian movement). In contrast, others turned their back on their race/class privilege by throwing in their lot with the most unfortunate (e.g., the White middle-class youth who participated in the voter registration drives in the Deep South), or directly challenging the authority of social institutions (e.g., student demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic National Convention).

Whether 2008 or 1968, I suggest that we remain cautious about identifying adolescent, intergenerational rebellion as the normative framework for explaining the political activism of American youth. An overemphasis on the political activities of college-educated, White middle-class youth flattens the heterogeneity of youth activism that occurred in multiple social locations and that was refracted through a lens of race, class, gender, sexuality and, in this instance, age. Viewing the growth of political consciousness among youth through the lens of one segment that stands for the larger group (in this case, the experiences of White, male, middle-class college students who were allegedly radicalized either by their leftist professors and/or a palpable fear of being drafted to fight in Vietnam) is short-sighted. Instead, this period offers an intriguing opportunity to rethink the significance of age as a structure of power via focusing on the coming to political consciousness of a heterogeneous constellation of American youth.

Here I want to focus on one phenomenon in this expanded frame of youth activism, namely, how 1968 constituted a turning point in Black American student activism that in turn signalled a shift in African American social movement politics. I do so because, when it comes

to racial change in the United States, the political action of African American individuals and/or organized groups has been far more central in catalysing change than mainstream political thought typically recognizes.¹¹ I suggest that a closer look at African American youth activism does reinforce the theme of generational rebellion, but in the case of African American youth, their rebellion was against neither their parents nor their class privilege. Rather, I see the student activism of US Blacks as one component in intergenerational efforts by African Americans to disrupt racial business as usual in the United States and to change the terms of the intergenerational transfer of power.¹²

My argument is divided into three parts. First, by examining the significance of the construct of freedom as a visionary construct within African American politics and the struggle for education as its strategic, pragmatic counterpart, I sketch out an interpretive context for African American student activism.¹³ Freedom constitutes a deep taproot of African American social and political thought and education has long operated as a crucial site for Black freedom struggle. Education remains a critical strategic tool for social mobility within American society, and the longstanding struggle to gain a quality education for African American students from day care through post-graduate education means that the political struggles of Black American youth have been simultaneously intellectual and political. Thus, US Black students have long been politically active in struggles to create the conditions for their own educational opportunities, a social location that demonstrates clear relationships between ideas, social structures and politics.¹⁴ Moreover, this interpretive context of visionary pragmatism that links freedom and education draws on intersectional analyses of race, class and age. In essence, the race and class position of African American youth in the 1960s differentially positioned them in their understanding of politics, their own education, and their historical relationship with historically White institutions, specifically, colleges and universities.¹⁵

Second, I discuss core ideological tensions within US Black social and political thought around the contours of the freedom struggle that bubbled to the surface during the five-year period marked by Martin Luther King's 'I Have a Dream' speech at the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, to the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965 and King in 1968. I suggest that, for African American youth, 1968 constituted a distinctive turning point in the intellectual and political history of US Blacks that pivoted not solely on the events in Vietnam or the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, but also on the meaning of the King assassination. Rather, patterns of Black American youth activism

reflected longstanding ideological tensions within African American communities, in particular the ideological tensions within the emerging Black Power movement.

Third, I examine why King's assassination might have constituted a turning point for Black American student activism. In brief, King's assassination shifted ongoing debates among African American youth about the direction for Black freedom struggle by questioning the utility of integration as the expression of the vision of freedom and non-violence as the pragmatic strategy to achieve it. Black students on historically White campuses found themselves faced with a set of contradictions about the merits of integration and nationalism that were not simply ideological issues but that had pragmatic effects on their everyday lives. For US Black students who integrated historically White colleges and universities in the early 1960s, the college curriculum and its practices were not simply abstract issues of theory or ethics. Rather, struggles to desegregate historically White colleges and university campuses constituted expressions of Black freedom struggle. Claims for Black Studies programs and units reflect this phase of political struggle. Black students had to risk much to engage in campus politics. This placed them in a very different relationship to social movements than their middle-class White counterparts. It also led to very different decisions among African American students concerning how they would negotiate and change the contested racial terrain symbolized by 1968. Finally, I return to the theme of what lessons 1968 might hold for the unfolding political events of 2008.

I. Freedom, education and African American youth

Western intellectuals routinely analyse integration and nationalism as antithetical philosophies, weighing the relative merits of idea systems and then evaluating expressions of ideas in political behaviour. Instead, examining how African Americans actually use systems of ideas such as these within their everyday lived experience (often without using the terminology of nationalism or integration) constitutes a profitable approach to Black American politics.¹⁶ When it came to the 1960s, conversations about the merits of integration and nationalism occurred neither exclusively among US Black leaders nor among Black American intellectuals. Rather, African Americans from all walks of life engaged in these debates, creating a vibrant, cross-generational and political public sphere in which African American leaders and intellectuals both were situated. This was not a top-down use of ideology, with intellectual

fathers parsing out the merits of integration and nationalism and sharing this knowledge with the masses of US Blacks.¹⁷ Moreover, this was not a new debate, but rather was one that had long permeated analyses of the US Black freedom struggle.

One fundamental contradiction of American democracy pivots on the promise of freedom juxtaposed to the differential treatment of indigenous peoples, of people of African descent, of Latinos and of immigrant populations.¹⁸ For African Americans, this binary of freedom and slavery, of emancipation and captivity, operates as a core frame for African American social and political thought. African American history begins as a captivity narrative, the enslavement of people of African descent, their crystallization into an American ethnic group honed from both cultural similarities and a shared reality of racial oppression, and their struggle for literal and metaphoric freedom. On a basic level, anyone who has experienced captivity, being held against one's will and forced to engage in activities that one would be unlikely to choose, sees the significance of freedom. The construct of freedom was not simply a metaphor for Black American political theory, but also a construct that had literal resonance in lived African American experience. Within this context, 1968 was not an unusual, unprecedented event, but rather a visible rupture that exposed the contradictions of this foundational dilemma.¹⁹

The concept of *freedom* has multi-valent meanings within African American social and political thought.²⁰ Politically, the overarching goal of the protracted freedom struggle has been to gain first-class citizenship rights within democratic American institutions. The literal struggle for freedom is easily traced, with the construct of citizenship rights serving as a useful device for mapping this dimension of freedom struggle. The US Black freedom struggle can be traced as waves of ascendancy and repression, a forward and backward motion in time that constitutes a multi-textured achievement of an elusive freedom. During the period of slavery and of Jim Crow segregation, the goals of freedom struggles as well as the forms that they might take seemed clearer. Specifically, because the initial oppression of people of African descent consisted of enslaving their bodies, the US Black freedom struggle stressed emancipating Black American people's bodies from chattel slavery and gaining citizenship rights for newly recognized African American humanity. Upon emancipation, this new ethnic group of African Americans gained constitutionally protected, formal citizenship rights. However, the White Southern backlash against these newfound freedoms dashed African American hopes of experiencing first-class

citizenship in the same way that Whites did. Instead, Jim Crow policies of legal racial segregation relegated African Americans to second-class citizenship. The 60-year civil rights struggles that gained momentum in response to the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision in 1896 and that came to fruition in *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 framed sustained US Black activism to overturn racial segregation.

Education for African Americans has been an important focal point of this broader notion of freedom struggle. Each generation of African Americans faced a similar set of issues concerning the significance of education for empowerment. For slave youth, learning to read constituted a site of rebellion, a case aptly documented in the narratives of Frederick Douglass and others (Douglass 1962). For the emancipated children of former slaves, attending formal schools constituted the site of struggle. Because Southern governments refused to fund Negro education, ex-slaves supported their own institutions. Often the migration to urban areas of the South and to Northern cities was designed to provide better opportunities for youth, in particular the search for better schools.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s constitutes a visible and important case of this broader history linking education with the empowerment needed for the freedom struggle. Not only did the Civil Rights Movement attract African American youth, the catalyst for the movement itself was a Supreme Court decision concerning separate but equal education. As the movement continued and the depth of resistance to racial integration became evident, African American youth could see how education constituted a crucial terrain of struggle. In this sense, Black American youth were not simply beneficiaries of the civil rights struggle, but instead could envision and often needed to become politically active as part of their coming of age narrative. In some cases, the involvement of youth in the political issues of the 1950s and 1960s took tragically palpable forms. For example, when *Jet* magazine published photographs such as the open casket of Emmet Till, a 14-year-old Black American boy who was murdered for allegedly looking at a White woman, or the debris left after the 1963 bombing of a Birmingham church that killed four African American girls in Sunday school, youth took notice. These images of murdered Black American children refuted the dominant ideology that American society was, in fact, 'separate and equal,' and that children were beyond politics itself. Instead, it was apparent that just as attacks on a few children symbolized the vulnerability of all Black American children to racist violence, that solutions to such structural patterns would not rest on helping

children one at a time but mandated serious attention to group-based strategies.

Court-mandated racial integration encompassed a wide array of areas (housing, public accommodations, etc.), yet none was as controversial as desegregating public schools. By the mid-1960s, some public school districts had made tentative efforts to desegregate whereas others dug in their heels and refused. Southern Whites routinely defied court orders to desegregate schools, in some cases catalysing the need to send troops into Southern schools. A lone African American first-grade girl who needed federal troops to escort her to school, for example, desegregated the New Orleans public schools.

By the 1960s, historically White colleges and universities could no longer invoke a 'separate but equal' ideology to defend exclusionary policies. As the enrolment of African American students on historically White campuses increased, these early arrivers did not experience their college life as a respite from the real world. Instead, getting an education in these formerly segregated settings constituted an extension of the ongoing political struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Their arrival in some sense represented a tangible victory. Individual African American college students may not have engaged in political struggle to gain access, like the case of the New Orleans first grader who desegregated her local public school; yet African American students who desegregated their campuses changed them, if only by being visible.²¹

Black American students may have been familiar with the general framework of freedom and the significance of education, but this generation that desegregated US colleges and universities in the 1960s also grappled with a particular manifestation of a longstanding ideological tension within African American social and political thought, namely the relative benefits of integration or Black Nationalism.

II. Integration and nationalism: Key ideological tensions of Black solidarity

African American students carried with them into newly desegregating institutions of higher education heterogeneous points of view on a variety of unresolved topics, including: (1) their duties and obligations as key figures in the 'race's' advancement, specifically, leadership; (2) the necessity for Black solidarity and Black unity among Black American youth in unwelcoming racial contexts; and (3) the special contributions, if any, required of Black youth as individuals for collective African American advancement. Many also came with social

movement experience that involved substantial risk taking. In brief, many students also carried the tension between integration and nationalism into higher education settings where getting an education itself was inherently politicized.

Black freedom struggle not only focused on education, it also required variations of social and political solidarity. This core principle of US Black freedom struggle found its origins in this early struggle for African American emancipation. Central to the notion of solidarity is the assumption that African Americans comprise a historically constituted group who, because they share a common history of racial oppression as well as shared (albeit far from uniform) experience with institutionalized racism, have common interests. For example, African American women and men both experience racism, but often in gender-specific fashion. Similarly, social class differences among African Americans have long existed, yet these differences often disappeared in the face of uniform treatment by Whites. Slavery certainly stressed the need for solidarity – it made little sense to try and ‘free’ enslaved Black Americans one by one. Group-based political oppression mandates group-based political remedies.

The contemporary tendency, to juxtapose integration and nationalism as contradictory ideologies for African American political activism, is often interpreted as a deep-seated, ideological tension within African American social and political thought. In contrast, when contextualized within a broader framework of a US Black freedom struggle, these ideologies become redefined as tactical and strategic disagreements within a sustained commitment to the broader construct of freedom. Historically, notions of Black solidarity have accommodated bitterly opposed expressions of these seemingly antithetical perspectives. Yet integration and nationalism both share the ethical commitment to freedom for Black Americans as a collectivity (the freedom struggle is not an individualistic construct) and the necessity of some form of Black solidarity to get there.²²

African American social and political thought holds many examples of African American leaders who counselled commitment to Black solidarity, but who expressed it by looking either inwards (diverse Black Nationalist agendas of community development); or outwards (issues oriented, social justice agendas, for example, integration); or in some cases, the necessity of coalitions among groups with seemingly different political ideologies and agendas. Stated differently, African American politics has long required a creative tension between nationalist projects that represent political mobilization by US Blacks in defence

of African American interests and broader, social justice projects where US Blacks engage in issue-oriented alliances and coalitions for concerns such as employment, schooling, health care. For example, these tensions shape the corpus of work by African American journalist Ida Wells-Barnett. Wells-Barnett is best known for her anti-lynching activism, an outward-looking strategy that identified how racial segregation catalysed significant abuse of power. Yet, she also engaged in community development activities that were designed to uplift African American migrants in Chicago (see Collins 2002). It makes little sense to achieve equal access to unemployment or lack of discrimination in health clinics that are closed or that do not exist.

Rather than examining the virtues of various political philosophies based on their merits of logic and links to empirical verifiability, the test of African American social and political thought lay in its flexibility and pragmatic responses to historically specific situations.²³ Within this framework, the value of intellectual and political leaders often lay in their familiarity with these ideological perspectives and their ability to craft them in response to political needs. The freedom struggles of the 1950s and 1960s illustrate these tensions. For example, whereas Martin Luther King, Jr, is typically depicted as a 'non-violent integrationist,' Michael Dyson contends that King's work more accurately reflected an 'enlightened nationalism.' In explaining this concept, Dyson contends that King 'never succumbed to tribal loyalties that subverted the principles of fundamental equality and democracy for the citizenry of America. But he did embrace the need for Black people to organize themselves for the purposes of Black upward political economic mobility, and not in a selfish way, but in a fashion that would enhance the collective standing of the race' (Dyson 2003: 332). Dyson encourages us to resist the current tendency to categorize important leaders such as King within the narrow framework of 'race-only' politics. One need not throw out Black solidarity in order to pursue broader agendas of equality and democracy.

King was not alone. Within this same logic, Malcolm X, who is typically viewed as a nationalist, at the time of his assassination was developing a more complex and comprehensive view of Black American political struggle that did take note of broader social justice projects. In 'The Ballot or the Bullet,' Malcolm X (2000: 431) not only outlines the principles of Black Nationalism, but also asks his audience to question the culpability of the federal government in reinforcing racial oppression, and to search for new allies to fight the Black freedom struggle:

The same government that you go abroad to fight and die for is the government that is in a conspiracy to deprive you of your voting rights, deprive you of your economic opportunities, deprive you of decent housing, deprive you of decent education. . . . This government has failed the Negro. This so-called democracy has failed the Negro. And all these white liberals have definitely failed the Negro. So, where do we go from here? First, we need some friends. We need some new allies.

Malcolm X may have appeared to be especially hard on White liberals, but the subsequent capitulation of the Democratic Party to the conservative Republicans in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that he may not have been far off. During that period, alliances with the White liberals who preached gradualism and assimilation apparently did not serve African Americans well. Identifying how the liberal agenda of continuing to petition the government was fundamentally flawed, Malcolm X counselled African Americans to seek new 'friends,' namely coalitions with groups who had a similar interest in social justice and could support a Black American freedom struggle.²⁴

With hindsight, the perceived contradictions between these two ideological positions may be resolved somewhat by using a different language to describe the integration focal point. Strategies for racial integration are just that – strategies to achieve social justice for African Americans within a context of racism. The variations of nationalism deployed by African Americans also constitute strategies that seek similar ends. The way forward here may be to flesh out the links between the more robust construct of struggles for social justice that can take myriad forms (such as the US Black freedom struggle with its ideological poles of integration and nationalism). Linking both social justice and nationalist initiatives in this fashion within the broader context of a US Black freedom struggle that embraced a heterogeneous conception of Black solidarity enables us to map different configurations of thought and politics at distinctive historical junctures. The 1960s constituted an era where a variety of cross-cutting and consensus themes within African American social and political thought were questioned, reformed and transformed.

The early 1960s revealed the increasing tension between these two prominent ideological strands that emerged to shape the contours of Black American political struggle. Integration and nationalism, as expressed through social movement politics, were two sides of the same coin, a Janus-headed figure that was having increasing difficulty reining

in the growing anger and upheaval in African American communities. The assassination of Malcolm X in 1963 did little to shut down growing sentiments towards nationalism, in part due to King's presence as a moderating influence on African Americans, as well as continuing anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the Third World that demonstrated the effectiveness of nationalism for political emancipation.²⁵

II. 1968: The assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr, as a turning point in US Black student activism

By 1968, it was apparent that King himself was developing a more robust political analysis that increasingly recognized the significance of social class factors and American militarism in fostering the deeply entrenched problems that African Americans faced. King saw issues of American militarism (the War in Vietnam) and social class inequality as refracted through the specific contours of racial hierarchy in the United States, as foundational to African American disadvantage. More importantly, King increasingly organized around a more robust analysis of class and power, as evidenced by his planned participation in the Poor People's March on Washington, DC, that was cut short by his assassination. King's politics were not catalysed by a specific event that affected him personally (the threat of being drafted spurring middle-class White students to action, or the threat that perhaps one would not get the job that one expected all one's life, would be there when one got a degree). Rather, King's politics, although excised of its growing radicalism via media repackaging in short-cut phrases such as integration, man of peace and non-violence, constituted a significant shift in the social justice issues of multi-race, multi-class alliances among Americans.²⁶

In this context, King's assassination in 1968 constituted a thunderbolt for many groups, but especially for African American college students. Virtually overnight, his death encouraged Black students not only to challenge strategies of racial integration as a core strategy for Black freedom struggle, but also to question their own placement in colleges and universities in the context of democratic politics. Like the elementary and high school students who integrated New Orleans, Little Rock and other Southern school districts, the arrival of Black students on historically White campuses was the tangible measure of civil rights itself. Yet the assassination of King placed the justification for civil rights at risk. The struggle might be long indeed if King, who was then seen by Black students as the voice of moderation, was killed. How long would the Black freedom struggle take with the one-at-a-time glacial pace of

measured social change? Was the struggle going fast enough? Why not demand freedom now?

Patterns of African American student response to the assassination were varied. Yet it was clear that Black Nationalism rose in stature and became increasingly significant for African American students. Many of these actions have been recast through the lens of a redefined identity politics as a separatist, inward looking, narcissistic endeavour where African American students turned their back on the social justice traditions exemplified by Martin Luther King, Jr. I think that this is a re-reading of the past through the conservative frameworks of the present that have a vested interest in undermining histories of progressive political struggles, especially Black freedom struggles. Let me recount three examples from this period that illustrate the complexities of the times.²⁷

The first demand that came from this period was the struggle for Black Studies itself. Recently, there have been efforts to rewrite this struggle as a multi-cultural endeavour and/or as a result of White philanthropic support for Black activism (Rooks 2006). Perhaps such support was more common in unusual settings, namely the multi-cultural setting of San Francisco or the moneyed halls of Princeton. Such efforts misread the significance of the racial segregation of American higher education of that period, one where the struggle for Black Studies was one of struggling for the inclusion of actual Black people as well as an effort to desegregate knowledge itself. In the 1960s, Black Studies initiatives focused on the institutional transformation of the very institutions of higher education. In this way, King's death radicalized Black students to demand not simply spots within the institution, leaving its structure basically unchanged, but rather transformation of those institutions so that they could not continue business as usual. Because the currency of universities is knowledge, attacking inequalities in the curriculum and how they in turn framed inequalities among students (admissions, testing, etc.) constituted core issues of early Black students' initiatives.

The second example comes from my own experiences with African American student protest at Harvard University. Students negotiated with the administration and subsequently occupied a building to protest the university's racially differential labour practices concerning its painters and painters' helpers. The painters were unionized and White while the painters' helpers were uniformly non-unionized African American workers. Although painters' helpers did virtually the same work, the unionized White painters were paid considerably more than the non-unionized African American painters' helpers. This example

illustrates the broadening of the Black student political agenda from race to issues of class within Black American student politics. The focus of the struggle was to help the painters and the painters' helpers, not to gain more financial aid for students or hire some African American faculty role models. The focus here was not on forming alliances with the workers to figure out the best plan of attack on the state. Rather, the strategy was similar to that deployed by the (White) student movement, namely to use one's insider position to pressure the university to erase racial bias in its employment policies.

The third concerns the resurgence of modern Black Feminism, both across the diverse locations of integrationist and nationalist initiatives as well as an entity in its own right. It is important to keep in mind that politically active African American women moved among a variety of organizations. Chela Sandoval's (2000) analysis of differential movement as a way of doing theory and politics investigates this idea. There were iterations within social justice initiatives – African American women were in coalition with White women and other women of colour in the heterogeneity of feminist movement. Despite this movement, there also existed the need to organize on one's behalf, a tendency that pulls from the solidarity tradition. In their movement among various organizations, Black American women saw the limitations of those different organizations. There was a need to birth Black Feminism in dialogue with and in opposition to *both* the second wave feminist movement *and* the Black Nationalist movements.²⁸

In this political context of cross-cutting and collaborative relationships among political movements, many African American women organized separate organizations that focused on their specific needs, but also kept those organizations in dialogue with multiple political groups. For example, The Combahee River Collective (1995), one signature analysis of intersectionality that emerged during this period of youth activism, issued a statement that argued for a politics that took race, gender, class and sexuality into account. This statement had great influence on US Black Feminism.

III. 1968 and 2008: A new turning point?

This brief survey of US Black student activism in 1968 might help identify productive themes for analysing contemporary political activism. What are the lessons from the 1960s generally and this brief foray into African American youth activism in particular that might inform our understanding of contemporary youth activism?

First, the political activism of youth takes heterogeneous forms depending on the opportunities and constraints inherent in their social locations. The period of the 1960s shows how tidy analyses that focus on the behaviour of one segment of the American youth population miss the theoretical and political significance of the heterogeneity of race, class, gender and sexuality that occurred *within* one age population. Many young people worked in mono-identity organizational settings (e.g., gender-only women's groups such as the National Organization for Women, or race-only Black Nationalist organizations such as the Black Panther Party); some worked in multi-cultural settings (e.g., grassroots social justice organizations); some moved among various organizations, and some simply took to the streets (e.g., riots). A much broader approach would examine the range of organizations where youth were active in non-school settings, for example, the young mothers who participated in the National Welfare Rights Organization, or in Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), or similar grassroots organizations.²⁹

Not only is this true for 1968, it remains true today. Because US college campuses house many organizations ranging from the Young Republicans to students who want to end the genocide in Darfur, they provide numerous opportunities for youth activism. But other venues for youth activism exist around a range of specific issues ranging from HIV/AIDS awareness, to citizenship initiatives by immigrant youth and their allies, to environmental issues.³⁰ Since its emergence in the late 1970s, hip hop has been a site of contemporary Black youth activism by allowing inner city youth to give voice to their concerns and talk about life as they experienced it. In this sense, hip-hop culture can be seen as a site of cultural resistance (see, for example, Kitwana 2002; Clay 2006).

Second, any synthetic narrative about the political activism of youth requires examining multiple histories and the standpoints they might produce on a common political project. In this case, the shared ethos was the perceived need by youth in the 1950s and 1960s to engage in political activism in defence of social justice. Yet the social location of groups of youth, in fact, their very ability to recognize themselves as a group, suggests that individual and group placement within a matrix of domination of race, class, gender and age shaped the vision and patterns of political participation. It is important to keep in mind that had I written this narrative from the social location of gender and the feminist politics of the time, my 1968 story would have been quite different (see, for example, Valk 2008). Or had I examined the class politics of political activism among youth, one that sent poor and working class men not to

college but to Vietnam, the version of youth activism would have been different yet again. Recognizing how the differential placement of youth within a matrix of domination framed the experiences of middle-class Latinas, poor gay White men, working-class African American women and similar groups suggests that any ideology that is seemingly shared by these groups (in this case, the meaning of political activism and the forms that it might take) is best developed by attending to this heterogeneity. Moreover, this same heterogeneity that shaped the differential placement of youth writ large, also framed dynamics *within* African American youth populations. In this sense, the narrative presented here is not meant to stand for African American youth as a population, but is one that shows a sliver of action by a youth population that is most visible within the broader story of youth activism. In essence, this one story refracted through intersecting power relations of race, class, gender and age requires similar stories that use the same framework of analysis.

A third and related theme for analysing contemporary political activism concerns the varying forms that political activism took in the 1960s as compared to today. This version of praxis, the recursive relationship between theory and practice, differed in the two periods. Social movements of the 1950s and 1960s were actively engaged in theorizing creative responses to social conditions; and theories in turn shaped political decision-making. For African American students, the relative merits of integration and nationalism were tested not solely through logic, but also through the crucible of experience in the Black freedom struggle. This framework of praxis grounded in a recursive relationship between theory and action both catalysed additional theoretical perspectives (the case of Black Feminism) and shifted the terms of political participation (African American women who participated in multiple organizations).³¹

For politically active 1960s youth, face-to-face organizing was crucial. Politically active youth in the South faced dangerous, often life-threatening situations. It is important to remember that the Civil Rights Movement revealed how recalcitrant various levels of the US government could be in protecting its African American citizens. In some cases, the government condoned the murder of US Blacks by not investigating cases. African American students were at special risk, and thus could not count on fair treatment in schools and jobs as well as protection by the police. With the government infiltrating youth groups, personal contact was an element of building trust. Politically active 1960s youth also effectively used the mass media that was available to them for political ends. African American youth were a large part of

the Civil Rights Movement, and the Civil Rights Movement was one of the first social movements to be televised (the television coverage of Birmingham youth being attacked by dogs and sprayed with fire hoses comes to mind). Yet news of their local political activities was screened by a small number of mass media venues.

The lessons for contemporary political praxis are provocative. For contemporary youth, the recursive connections between ideas and society, social problems and intellectual production, persist, but the reduced dangers of political activity coupled with new communications technologies have enabled new ways of organizing. New possibilities exist for an innovative synergy between face-to-face organizing and the use of media. A more decentralized communications technology enables contemporary youth to organize *both* locally (on college campuses, in their neighbourhoods, etc.) *and* in imagined political space. In essence, many have gained valuable experience in this kind of praxis, in a different political context and by using dramatically different organizational tools.

The Obama campaign illustrates this emerging form of praxis. On the one hand, the Obama campaign utilized tried-and-true techniques of having people organize their neighbours and friends. This form of organizing creates a trustworthy cadre of people who participate in political communities. Because Obama ran a grassroots campaign, youth volunteers and paid staff practised problem solving about the nuts and bolts of political participation. They canvassed, made phone calls and learned the ropes of face-to-face community organizing. Their efforts to identify and work directly with voters in turn had important implications for the success of the campaign.

On the other hand, because a sizeable portion of the Millennial Generation and their immediate generational predecessors grew up with computers, the Internet and cell phones, the Obama campaign was able to draw upon the technical sophistication of youth volunteers and campaign workers.³² An arsenal of communications tools that were unavailable 20 years ago dramatically changed the contours of community organizing. For example, the Internet created unprecedented social networks (MySpace, Facebook, etc.) as well as numerous written and visual opportunities for youth to become citizen-journalists (blogs, YouTube, etc.). The actual campaign relied on email and text messaging, two relatively inexpensive mechanisms for communicating with large numbers of people instantaneously. For example, Obama supporters could sign up to receive an early text message announcing Obama's Vice Presidential running mate; or those attending the convention were

told to text friends and family to watch the speeches.³³ The Obama team seems to be carrying over the use of technology from the campaign into the Presidency. Like the campaign website, the transition team has set up a post-election website, <http://change.gov/>, that contains a news-room blog with YouTube videos of events since the election. The website also has a section where visitors can share their visions for the country.

Increased youth activism in the 1960s and today suggests a fourth significant theme for analysing contemporary political activism, namely the intergenerational transfer of power. In essence, youth political activism of the 1960s was a response against efforts in the 1950s to reinstall seemingly conservative values in American families, neighbourhoods and political institutions. African Americans, Latinos and women in particular had enjoyed new freedoms during the Second World War and simply could not go back to former ways of being. Similarly, the deeply conservative turn within American politics symbolized by the 1980 election of President Ronald Reagan can be seen as a direct response to the radicalism of 1968. This cycling of political positions among liberal and conservative ideologies suggests that there is considerable reason for optimism that a more multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and tolerant US population that has been raised in a different political and media context may in fact wield the reins of power differently.

The unprecedented 2008 Presidential election suggests that such a shift is at hand. The 2008 election may mark the coming of age of a generation of youth whose adult memories have been shaped by a combination of post 9/11 rhetoric, of environmental degradation and a Janus-headed mass media that simultaneously homogenizes global culture and provides a dizzying array of digital tools with which to navigate it. We may be in yet another awakening of youth politics, this time refracted not primarily through issues oriented, social justice themes expressed via social movement activities, but rather through electoral politics itself.³⁴

At the same time, we must be cautious not to vest unreasonably high expectations in either the youngest members of Obama's coalition or any one charismatic leader. Frantz Fanon, an intellectual whose ideas inspired African American youth movements of the 1960s, points to the dangers of seeing independence (or in this case, the 2008 election) as the inherently positive defining moment of a generational freedom struggle. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963: 112) says,

Before independence, the leader, as a rule, personified the aspirations of the people – independence, political freedom, and national dignity. But in the aftermath of independence, far from actually

embodying the needs of the people, far from establishing himself as the promoter of the actual dignity of the people, which is founded on bread, land, and putting the country back into their sacred hands, the leader will unmask his inner purpose: to be the CEO of the company of profiteers composed of a national bourgeoisie intent only on getting the most out of the situation ... His honesty, which is purely a frame of mind, gradually crumbles. The leader is so out of touch with the masses that he manages to convince himself they resent his authority and question the services he has rendered to the country.

Certainly, Fanon identifies a crucial danger for a generational shift in power. Many newly independent nation-states found that the leadership and forms of political activism organization that effectively brought about the transfer of power were less effective in governing.³⁵ Yet because this story is still being written, it need not be the way Fanon predicts.

Finally, this foray into youth activism of 1968 raises questions about the significance of specific political events as defining moments in the political self-understandings and behaviour of a generation. Like others of my cohort, I remember 1968 as a year of student upheavals that signalled a shift in social movement politics among youth. Yet, as evidenced by emerging research on 1968, political activism by youth was not solely an American phenomenon but rather signalled something far broader. Similar youth movements in France, Bengal, Pakistan, Senegal, South Africa and other locations suggest that a global phenomenon of youth activism was at play in 1968.³⁶ Unlike contemporary youth, we lacked the communications technology to craft a global movement. As I write this chapter, it is simply too early to tell from within this historic moment. But when we look back on 2008, we might ask, in what ways did 2008 constitute a turning point, for those who came of age, but also who aspired to come to power?

Notes

1. I would like to thank Kendra Barber, University of Maryland College Park, Department of Sociology, for invaluable research and editorial assistance for this chapter.
2. An estimated 24 million Americans aged 18–29 voted in this election, reflecting an increase in youth turnout by at least 2.2 million over 2004. That puts youth turnout somewhere between 49.3 and 54.5 per cent, meaning 19 per cent more young people voted this year than in 2004. Exit polls show 66 per cent of voters aged 18–29 preferred Obama and 32 per cent preferred McCain (Dahl 2008). Thus, it is safe to say that the Obama campaign relied

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on a large percentage of youth workers and voters. At the same time, it is premature to assess the specific demographics by cohort (Generation X, the Millennial Generation, the Hip-Hop Generation) of political participation, primarily because the significance of this youth vote has only recently been recognized.

3. This belief may have been fuelled by the visibility of hip-hop culture in the 1990s and its expressions of social protest. For discussions of this generational analysis, see Kitwana (2002), Bynoe (2004) and Clay (2006). For a provocative analysis of the potential political behaviour of African Americans in the Hip-Hop Generation, see Goff (2008).
4. In his book, *Youth to Power: How Today's Young Voters are Building Tomorrow's Progressive Majority*, political activist Michael Connery provides a generational analysis of youth activism in the United States. Connery makes a distinction between the era of Generation X where, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, volunteerism and civic engagement among young people went into a steep decline, and the Millennial Generation. After the 2000 election and in 2004, young voter turnout began to increase. Connery contends that this new Millennial Generation is redefining civic participation and the growth of progressive youth activism (Connery 2008: 9–10). Using Connery's argument, the Obama campaign did not lead the Millennial Generation, a trend that preceded Obama's decision to run for president, but rather recognized the trend and worked with it. For another analysis of the Millennial Generation, see Howe and Strauss (2000).
5. In this chapter, I use the '1960s' as a shorthand term for the three decades of youth activism beginning in the 1950s with the Civil Rights Movement and continuing into the 1970s with the feminist and gay and lesbian movements. The 1960s constitutes the peak of political activity for this period.
6. A brief synopsis of the events of 1968 includes the following: on 31 January, the Viet Cong opened the Tet Offensive by attacking major cities in south Vietnam, a move that triggered President Lyndon B. Johnson's call for peace negotiations. On 31 March, Johnson announced that he would not run for re-election. On 4 April, Martin Luther King, Jr, was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, a move that led to riots in Washington, DC, and other cities. In June, Robert F. Kennedy, former US attorney general and US senator from New York, was assassinated while campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination. In August, the Democratic National Convention encountered clashes between Vietnam War protesters and the Chicago police force. Over hundred demonstrators were arrested and over hundred more were injured. At Mexico City's Summer Olympic Games in October, African American sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos won gold and bronze medals, respectively, and then raised their hands in the Black Power fist during the playing of the national anthem.
7. See, for example, Abramson *et al.* (1971). For an analysis of the Brown Berets, a group founded by Chicano youth who modelled themselves after the Black Panther Party, see Muñoz (1989).
8. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a student activist movement in the United States, was one of the main iconic representations of the country's New Left. The organization developed and expanded rapidly in

- the mid-1960s before dissolving at its last convention in 1969. Though various organizations have been formed in subsequent years as proposed national networks for left-wing student organizing, none has approached the scale of SDS, and most have lasted a few years at best. For a discussion of these issues, see Calvert (1991).
9. Students at certain colleges began to see the importance of equal rights for LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) people. The first student gay rights group, the Student Homophile League (SHL), was formed in 1967 at Columbia University, organized by a student, Stephen Donaldson. While the SHL attracted negative attention from the media, it inspired other gay activists to begin SHL chapters at different universities. For an overview, see Dynes (2002) or Beemyn (2003).
 10. For a discussion of whiteness as property, see Harris (1993).
 11. Prematurely embracing adolescent rebellion as the social theory explaining the 1960s youth activism identifies blind spots in Western social theory concerning not just age (youth), but also the politics of race and Black political activism. For example, paths to Black American student activism certainly resembled and intersected those followed by White middle-class students, yet one is not derivative of or a special case of the other. We must be careful not to develop analyses of youth activism that constitute yet another example of how Western social theory misreads racial politics. As Jalali and Lipset flatly assert, 'race and ethnicity provide the most striking example of a general failure among experts to anticipate social developments in varying types of societies' (1998: 317). Much evidence supports their thesis. For example, assuming that the importance of ethnicity would decrease in conjunction with modernization, the sociology of race and ethnicity seemed unprepared for the resurgence of racial/ethnic conflict in the 1990s. Conflicts in places as diverse as Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Canada, Sri Lanka and Malaysia challenged the theoretical consensus among Marxist and non-Marxist scholars alike that industrialization, urbanization and education would foster racial and ethnic group integration into emerging democracies (Jalali and Lipset 1998). American sociology in the 1950s provides an especially glaring example of this myopia. Its preoccupation with racial attitudes held by White Americans apparently blinded it to the rumblings of African American unrest that exploded into sit-ins, marches, protest rallies, and a sustained civil rights movement in its own backyard. As James McKee points out, 'the sociologists of race relations had not simply failed to predict a specific event; rather, they had grievously misread a significant historical development. The race relations that appeared in their writings were incongruent with the race relations to be found in the society around them' (1993: 2).
 12. In this chapter, I capitalize the terms *African American*, *Black American* and *US Blacks* and use all three interchangeably to describe the group of 35 million people. According to the 2000 Census, there are 34,658,190 people who are Black/African American alone, but 36,419,434 who are Black/African American alone or in combination with other racial categories. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs/phc-t8/tables/tab03.pdf>. I use the criteria of a social group whose experience in the United States has been shaped by the African Slave Trade, American slavery, and/or history with legal and *de jure* racial segregation. These patterns

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of capitalization parallel similar terms that are routinely used to describe US racial/ethnic groups, for example, Irish Americans, Puerto Ricans, Mexican Americans and Asian Americans. The controversies revolve on the capitalization of 'Black,' one that resembles debates a century ago about the need to capitalize 'negro.' I am aware of the debates about the social construction of race and the use of the term 'Black.' For a developed analysis of the nuances of these debates, see my comprehensive discussion of the construct of 'social Blackness' in Collins (forthcoming).

13. Here I invoke the idea of *visionary pragmatism* that I argue has been central to African American women's theory and practice. For discussions of this construct, see my discussions in *Fighting Words* (Collins 1998) and in the Afterword of *Another Kind of Public Education* (Collins forthcoming). For an edited volume that further develops this construct, see James *et al* (1993).
14. African American intellectuals confront similar issues, but not about access to education itself, but rather access to intellectual freedom. US Black activism has required struggles to create the conditions that foster one's intellectual production.
15. This activism also invokes a different conception of praxis, one that is grounded in African American social and political thought specifically, but that also has been influenced by broader traditions of American pragmatism. For two classic works in American pragmatism that invoke this notion of praxis, see Mills (2000) and Dewey (1954). The centrality of African Americans to American pragmatism has been overlooked. For analysis of pragmatism and race, see the essays in Lawson and Koch (2004).
16. For representative work in traditional approaches to integration and nationalism as philosophies, see Shelby (2005). For an example of how a population might use ideology to craft its everyday lived experience, see my analysis of how Afrocentrism, a specific variety of Black Cultural Nationalism, has been used by African Americans as a civil religion (Collins 2006: 75–94).
17. I refer to this approach as a 'family lineage' model of knowledge production. Under this approach, we study the ideas of prominent thinkers by examining which intellectuals influenced them, and then aim to identify which thinkers they 'trained' or influenced. This approach privileges the ideas of Western White men joined together in a socially constructed family lineage of intellectual fathers and sons. This routine intellectual history model works less perfectly for analysing the ideas and actions of politically active groups. Here I use a social history or social context model as more useful in examining African American student activism, namely, the recursive relationship between social location, ideas and political behaviour. In its focus on preparing citizenry for American democracy, American pragmatism argued for this approach to ideas and action. See, for example, Mills (2000) and Dewey (1954).
18. For African Americans, the vision of freedom takes a palpable form and frames pragmatic action. It is a form of visionary pragmatism and has been a collective vision that sustains the struggle for freedom from one generation to the next. There is a pragmatic element to this vision so that one tempers one's political activity around the historical times. For two analyses of the significance of the concept of freedom to African American political struggle, see Kelley (2002) and King (1996). Also, consult the speeches of

- Martin Luther King, Jr, for examples of how King repeatedly refers to the term 'freedom' as part of civil rights (Carson and Shepard 2002). Also, see note 16.
19. Here I am following a social movements philosophy that sees social movements as having phases of visibility and abeyance that flow into one another. Within this framework, social movements for social justice, for example, will be ongoing as long as social justice has not been achieved. Outsiders can see phases of quiescence or 'peace' as evidence for the death of a movement yet such periods may signal a different phase. For a discussion of this concept applied to the US women's movement, see Taylor (1989).
 20. Before I discuss education and its relationship to freedom and African American freedom struggle, I want to provide an interpretive framework. For one, African American thinkers often use the construct of freedom to describe the broad array of political activities within African American thought and politics. Specifically, for histories of African American politics that implicitly use this notion of freedom struggle, see Berry (1994) and Franklin (1992). For two distinctive analyses of the centrality of freedom for African American politics, see Kelley (2002) and King (1996). As a concept, freedom has objective and subjective resonance throughout African American culture, as in poet Nikki Giovanni's plaintive cry in her 'Woman Poem' during the Black Arts Movement, 'I wish I knew how it would feel to be free' (Giovanni 1968). Despite the centrality of the term *freedom* within African American history, I use the term freedom carefully. Because freedom is such a powerful word that can invoke subjective meanings, politicians and protest groups alike appropriate the term and use it to advance their own political agendas. For example, the Bush administration (2000–2008) invaded Iraq in search of weapons of mass destruction under the heading 'Operation Iraqi Freedom.' Freedom is a slippery concept – freedom from what, freedom to do what, for what purpose. In a context where representations and ideas play such an important part in a society that disproportionately ghettoizes and locks up African Americans, consciousness as a sphere of freedom takes on added importance. My discussion of 'The Power of a Free Mind' is designed to investigate this dimension of freedom struggle (Collins 2004: 303–7).
 21. In 1964, there were an estimated 15,000 Black students enrolled in predominantly White colleges in the South, representing a fourfold increase since 1957. Meanwhile, African American undergraduate enrolments in Northern colleges had increased from around 45,000 in 1954 to almost 95,000 in 1967–1968. The number of Black Americans attending White colleges in the South during the first half of the decade of the sixties rose from 3000 in 1960 to 24,000 in 1965, and to 98,000 by 1970. Between 1965 and 1970, African American enrolment in White institutions more than tripled. Simultaneously, African American enrolments in historically Black colleges and universities had dropped from 82 per cent of all college-attending Blacks to 60 per cent between 1965 and 1970; it declined to 40 per cent by 1978 (Lucas 1994: 241–2). For a review of research that discusses the backgrounds and political activism of Black students attending predominately White universities, see Willie and Cunnigen (1981).

22. For a substantive, philosophical analysis of African American solidarity that develops the ideas sketched out here, see Shelby (2005). I suspect that the need for group-based politics is more difficult to see in the contemporary context. In the contemporary period of post-structural analysis, the very construct of group presented in this survey has come under attack, and if one dismantles the recognition of a shared group status, one simultaneously dismantles its politics (Collins 1998: 201–8).
23. It also explains the seeming contradictions within the intellectual and political work of individual African American thinkers. One might begin as a Black Nationalist and advocate for Black solidarity but will quickly see that, under conditions of contemporary globalization, freedom can never be won through a simplistic separatist agenda. This seems to be the path that Malcolm X was following during the last year of his life after he broke with the Nation of Islam. See the end of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965). Conversely, one might begin analysis within a framework of integration and human rights, yet see that if African Americans fail to advocate on their own behalf, the state is likely to remain unresponsive. Some of the later speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr, suggest that he was increasingly responsive to nationalist perspectives. For example, in ‘Where Do We Go From Here?’ one of his later speeches, King speaks of Operation Breadbasket and economic boycotts of recalcitrant companies. He asks his largely African American audience to stand in solidarity and use economic power. See Carson and Shepard (2002: 185–6). Neither figure arrived at a destination, but both were assessing the possible links between integration and nationalism.
24. Given how Malcolm X is routinely treated as a Black Nationalist separatist, it is noteworthy that he titled this famous speech ‘The Ballot or the Bullet.’ The undue attention given to the bullet may have been catalysed by Fanon’s discussion of revolutionary violence as a route to Black male subjecthood (Fanon 1963). Yet Malcolm X’s focus on the ballot, while seemed to be slower and reformist, also constitutes a political choice.
25. The work of Frantz Fanon was especially significant for nationalist groups like the Black Panthers who often cast their political projects in the context of domestic decolonization. For representative work, see Fanon (1963).
26. For an especially suggestive speech that captures King’s deepening radicalism, see his ‘Beyond Vietnam’ speech (Carson and Shepard 2002: 133–64). Also, for a revisionist analysis of King that identifies his radicalism, see Dyson (2000).
27. For a sample of work on African American student activism, see Anderson-Bricker (1999), Franklin (2003) and Rosenthal (1975).
28. For an analysis of these trends in Black Feminism, see Collins (2006). For an historical analysis of how African American women were positioned within these relations, see Valk (2008).
29. For example, ACORN was started in 1970 (<http://acorn.org/index.php?id=12447&L=0%2Findex.php%3Fid%3D4201>). For an analysis of women’s activism among various groups, see Valk (2008).
30. For example, for AIDS awareness, see the Youth Force as one example of a global youth organization centred around HIV/AIDS activism, <http://youthaids2008.org/en/about/background.html>. For an example of

citizenship activism by immigrant youth, see 'Walkouts May Signal Rebirth of Youth Activism' by Lourdes Medrano, *Arizona Daily Star*, 3/31/06, <http://www.nusd.k12.az.us/schools/nhs/gthomson.class/articles/first.amend/Walkouts.signal.rebirth.youth.activism.pdf>. For environmental issues, consult the Student Environmental Action Coalition or SEAC, a grassroots, youth organization based in the US and Canada, <http://www.seac.org/>. For work on queer activism, especially various Gay-Straight alliances in high schools and colleges, as well as LGBT organizations on college campuses, see Driver (2008). For an overview of youth activism, see Ginwright, Noguera and Cammarota (2006).

31. There was a more robust space for a public sociology and the praxis that it reflects and engenders.
32. For example, Kendra Barber reports that one of the Obama emails that she received during the campaign offered her the opportunity to be trained in grassroots organizing. Volunteers were offered a place to stay for several days during training, after which they were expected to return to their home communities and organize.
33. Just as politically active youth of the 1960s and 1970s rejected the family lineage model of legitimated knowledge, so might politically active youth of today have no need for the gate keeping, interpretive processes of editorial pages of local newspapers, or television pundits on the nightly news. There are many ways to make and obtain news, with the notion of the citizen-journalist emerging as an especially crucial area among youth. For example, access to cell phones with digital cameras created entirely new communications possibilities for political organizing.
34. For an interesting analysis of how Obama connects with the Millennial Generation, see *Millennial Makeover: MySpace, YouTube, and the Future of American Politics* (<http://www.millennialmakeover.com/Articles/Newsweek%20McCain,%20Obama%20and%20the%20Millennial%20Generation.htm>). See an article on this site by Andrew Romano called 'McCain, Obama, and the Millennial Makeover' that talks about Obama having millennial values. In a 2008 *Newsweek* article titled 'He's One of Us Now,' Romero argues that Obama is the first millennial to run for president. He said 'my point in the piece wasn't to alter the space-time continuum by suggesting that Obama is a millennial; obviously he's too old for that. Instead it was, as I wrote then, to show "how fully and seamlessly he embodies the attitudes, aspirations and shortcomings of the generation that's rallied around him"' (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/109589/output/print>).
35. Robert Mugabe's failed state in Zimbabwe provides an especially stark example. The trajectory of Mugabe's rule raises additional questions about how and why politically active student leaders often become conservative when they govern. Karl Mannheim sketches out a preliminary explanation for this phenomenon. Mannheim notes, 'It appears to be a generally valid law of the structure of intellectual development that when new groups gain entry into an already established situation they do not take over without further ado the ideologies which have already been elaborated for this situation, but rather they adapt the ideas which they bring with them through their traditions to the new situation... When these strata had come to occupy the social position previously held by

the conservatives, they quite spontaneously developed a feeling for life and modes of thought which were structurally related to conservatism' (Mannheim 1954: 249).

36. Several papers presented at the *1968: Impact and Implications* Conference that catalysed this volume examined this question of particular expressions of youth activism in different national settings.

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