

Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America, edited by Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard. New York: New York University Press, 2005. xv, 328 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$65.00 cloth, \$22.00 paper.

Reviewer Kristin Anderson-Bricker is associate professor of history at Loras College. Her dissertation was "Making a Movement: The Meaning of Community in the Congress of Racial Equality, 1958-1968."

This exciting volume of edited essays "was born as a tribute to John Dittmer, to the dramatic impact his book has had on the research agenda and interpretation of civil rights history, and the new scholarship it has inspired" (5). Dittmer's *Local People* (1994) represents a groundbreaking work in civil rights historiography because of its emphasis on the initiative, tactical innovation, and persistence of local people. Yet Dittmer goes further to connect the grassroots movements of Mississippi to the "structural context" of their actions. By connecting individual local activists to the larger political and economic events of the moment, Dittmer reveals the complexity of the struggle for black equality. The 13 essays in *Groundwork* highlight this complexity by showing the breadth and diversity of movement activities between 1940 and 1980. Consequently, the editors posit, "this volume rewrites the history of the Black Freedom struggle in postwar America, showing that it was a movement across the nation . . . and that it was developed and realized by local people (not brought to them by movement leaders)" (13).

As the scholars contributing to *Groundwork* demonstrate, by seriously analyzing the people and activities undertaken at the grass roots, our understanding of the movement will change. Several themes across the essays challenge established ideas in the historiography. Rather than focusing on charismatic leaders, these authors conceptualize the Black Freedom struggle as "a web of local struggles" (3). This change of orientation suggests that local people influenced the movement nationally by undertaking the mundane groundwork necessary for a movement to evolve, establishing the networks and infrastructure later co-opted by national groups, engaging in ideological debate, pulling the national movement to their ideas (such as self-defense), and connecting the national and global context to the local struggle.

The Midwest is well represented in the collection through essays on Des Moines, Milwaukee, Cincinnati, and Detroit. In his essay on the Des Moines Black Panther Party (BPP), Reynaldo Anderson argues that the Heartland chapters of the BPP differed from the national organization. In fact, "the Des Moines BPP was an example of how ideas were related on a local level by revolutionaries committed to their

constituents" (298). Rather than focusing on selling the Panther newspaper as the national organization insisted, the Des Moines chapter used the paper to teach literacy and undertake political education of its membership. Instead of endorsing the mandatory reading of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, the Des Moines BPP banned the book because of its endorsement of "revolutionary rape" and rape's contradiction of the central committee's declaration on behalf of women's liberation and equality (292). The local chapter also rejected the national's endorsement of drug use in moderation, given the local's programmatic efforts to end addiction. Anderson's essay uses oral history almost exclusively to introduce us to the Des Moines BPP. Do more extensive contemporary historical sources exist? How might the use of non-memory-based resources transform and further expand Anderson's narrative?

Patrick Jones's article on Black Power politics in Milwaukee further illustrates that the local context reveals the diversity of movement experiences. Jones documents the evolution of Father James Groppi, a white Catholic priest, and the NAACP Youth Council to a Black Power position. Groppi and the African American youth came together through a school desegregation campaign. When they turned their attention to the whites-only membership policy of the Eagles Club and a citywide open housing ordinance, intransigence in city government, the bombing of the NAACP headquarters, and violent white counter-protests radicalized them. To protect nonviolent activists, they formed a self-defense corps known as the Commandos. Unlike Black Power advocates in other cities, the Milwaukee Commandos and their adviser, Father Groppi, advocated "not-violence" (self-defense without the overt presence of weapons), "militant confrontation with entrenched local power structures," and African American self-determination and leadership (270, 276). They also embraced interracial cooperation and saw Black Power as a state of mind rather than a skin color. After black nationalists in Washington, DC, attacked the Commandos' acceptance of Father Groppi and their commitment to continue their open housing campaign with white allies, one Commando remarked, "This movement is black and white. It contains people of all colors. We do not turn anyone away who is seeking justice for the blacks and who is willing to work and sacrifice to bring it into existence" (260).

As these examples illustrate, the essays in *Groundwork* vividly introduce readers to local movements and provide inspiration to pursue similar questions in communities throughout the Midwest.

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