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### **Title**

Approaches to Black Power: African American Grassroots Political Struggle in Cleveland, Ohio, 1960-1966

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### **Abstract**

Black communities located in cities across the country became sites of explosive political unrest during the mid-1960s. These uprisings coincided with a period of intensified political activity among African Americans nationally, and played a decisive role in expanding national concern with black political struggle from a singular focus on the Civil Rights movement led by black southerners to consider the "race problem" clearly present in the cities of the North and West. Moreover, unrest within urban black communities emerged at a time when alternate political analyses of the relationship between black people and the American state that challenged the goal of integration and presented different visions of black freedom and identity were gaining considerable traction. The most receptive audience for these radical and nationalist critiques was found among black students and cadres of militant, young black people living in cities who insisted on the right to self determination for black people, and advocated liberation through revolution and the application of black power to secure control over their communities as the most appropriate goal of black political struggle.

The following study examines grassroots political organizations formed by black people in Cleveland, Ohio during the early 1960s in order to analyze the development of the tactics, strategies, and ideologies that became hallmarks of Black Power by the end of the decade. These developments are understood within the context of ongoing political struggle, and particular attention is paid to the machinations of the multifaceted system of racial oppression that shaped the conditions against which black Clevelanders fought. This struggle, initially aimed at securing unrestricted employment, housing, and educational opportunities for black people, and curtailing episodes of police brutality against them, culminated in five days of unrest during July 1966. The actions of city officials, especially the Mayor and members of the Cleveland Police Department, during the Hough uprising clarified the nature of black oppression in Cleveland, thereby illuminating the need for and uses of both the formal political power of the ballot, as well as the power of the bullet to defend black people and communities through the force of arms.

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