INTRODUCTION
“(Re)Framing the Beautiful Struggle: Black Student & Black Youth Activism”

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Initially, as an outgrowth of the whirlwind of student activity of the ‘60s, the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU) had a rather primary orientation toward the student sector of the Black Community. Ultimately, the realization that students are only a small part of the Black community, and only a fraction of the total forces of youth, caused a situation in which the name SOBU, no longer became descriptive of the focus of our activities. Many of us unconsciously equate a student movement as a youth movement, but facts are rapidly presenting themselves to the contrary. Students in many periods may be an active sector but are not representative of youth in general. We hope to clarify this unconscious equation – students are youth, but youth are not always students. Having broadened our base in practice, the name change to Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU) will only reflect objective reality.¹

-- Youth Organization for Black Development

On August 19, 1972, the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU) officially transitioned from being solely a ‘student’ based organization to an activist organization that evolved to include ‘youth’ in the fold of Black activism. No longer identifying as SOBU but now as the Youth Organization for Black Unity/YOBU, the Pan-Africanist collective aimed at assuming the mantle of being the vanguard Black student organization for the 1970s. From the organization’s inception, the objectives for SOBU were to build a revolutionary Pan-Africanist youth-centered collective with a

¹ The subtitle for this proposed special journal of Zanj is largely inspired by the organizational activities of the Student Organization for Black Unity (SOBU 1969-1974) that was founded in Greensboro, NC during the shifting yet highly controversial era of Black Power. According to Black Power scholar Peniel Joseph, SOBU along with organizations such as Malcolm X Liberation University of Greensboro, and the Center for Black Education in Washington, DC were the “second wave” Black Power organizations. From its outset, Black student collectives such as SOBU initiated its organizational line as a Black Nationalist and Pan African student led organization aimed at assuming the vanguard student leadership position that was occupied by SNCC but relinquished upon SNCC’s disbandment. As SOBU evolved to embrace a Marxist-Leninist ideological line, the organization experienced political shifts and ideological reconsiderations with respect to the Black student relationship to Black youth that may not have been in traditional school but were yet highly active in the Black struggle. Thus, SOBU evolved to become the Youth Organization for Black Unity (YOBU) by 1972 and YOBU re-directed its organizing objectives to align with Black youth and workers to build a vanguard organization aiming to lead the Black Freedom Movement into the 1970s. For more information on SOBU/YOBU, see, Fighting for Our Place in the Sun: Malcolm X and the Radicalization of the Black Student Movement 1960-1973, Chapter 6 and pp. 242-245, Richard D. Benson II. See also, Waiting ’Til the Midnight Hour: A Documentary History of the Black Power Movement, Peniel Joseph.
critical mass of national membership. Many Black youth activists of the era were reeling from the political exposure of the Black Power Movement, the renaissance of Pan Africanism during the early 1970s, the Vietnam War and accompanying protests, and the infectious New Left activism and student/youth collectives that gained momentum into the 1970s. These new Black student-youth activists represented a myriad of political and social experiences during early, yet pivotal stages of their lives. And these evolutions witnessed overwhelming participation of Black activist critiques of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism at home and abroad. Notwithstanding, factors of participation for these radicals did not involve degree seeking objectives from colleges and universities. These young people were intentional about creating systemic change and these high school, college age, community youth-based activists were engaging in revolution led largely by the efforts of the youth.²

This captures the essence of this special issue of ZANji: The Journal of Critical Global South Studies aptly entitled, “(Re)Framing the Beautiful Struggle: Black Student & Black Youth Activism.” This issue explores the re-centering of Black student/youth activism in the global anti-racist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist liberation struggles which have become the foundational models of social justice activism in the twenty-first century. Arguably, the canonical texts of the Black Freedom Struggle that have captured the breadth of the Civil Rights, Black Power, Pan-Africanist, New Left, Black Marxist, and Black Arts movements respectively owe a debt of immeasurable gratitude to Black students and Black youth. The bedrock mobilization efforts to achieve mass protest action for Black internationalist anti-racist protest has repeatedly found decentralized leadership in the energies of Black students and Black youth. Boycotts, sit-ins, marches, protests, mass mobilization efforts as tactics for systemic change created paradigm shifts in higher education. As will be explored in this special issue, Black students and youth created opportunities to engineer revolutionary curriculum changes in high schools and predominantly white institutions, community led organizations, political education implementation, anti-police brutality campaigns, freedom school implementation and global uplift of Black consciousness. All of these historical accomplishments can be attributed to high level Black student and youth mobilization and these activists remain as the unheralded vanguard for political change. As the title of the journal issue suggests, a historical re-imagining of the major contributions of Black student/youth led organizations is necessary to dismantle ‘top-down’ heroizing and pedestalization of charismatic figures which from a historical vantage point fail to capture the aerial perspectives, accomplishments, activities, political shifts,

² Historicizing the Black Freedom Struggle as a viable field of scholarship has yielded an expansive body of scholarship with a national representation of historical and political activities. Scholars have offered the classic narratives of a Southern-centric movement with messianic figures in tow. The evolving scholarship would come to interrogate the Black Freedom Struggle in local manifestations, regional representations and historicize the overall Black Freedom Movement in every sector of the country where Black activism challenged hegemony, colonialism, and all forms of anti-Blackness. Some of the earlier works produced that became noted as the foundational scholarship of the overall Black Freedom Struggle included: In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s by Clayborne Carson; The New Abolitionists by Howard Zinn; Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency by Doug McAdam; Black Awakening in Capitalist America by Robert L. Allen; SDS by Kirkpatrick Sales; and Race, Reform and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America by Manning Marable to name a few.
organizational splinters, educational influence, and historical value that students and instructors of the Black Freedom Struggle deploy to shape revolutionary activity.\footnote{In the past twenty years, several scholars have shifted the paradigm of bifurcated ‘classic’ narratives of the “Civil Rights Movement” versus the “Black Power Movement” to properly foreground the critical activist contributions of Black students/youth in the Black Freedom Movement. Some of those historians and their scholarship includes: *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* by Peniel Joseph; *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African-American Politics* by Cedric Johnson; *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* by James Forman; *Pure Fire: Self-Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era* by Christopher B. Strain; *The Black Arts Movement: Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s* by James E. Smethurst; and *Fighting for US: Maulana Karenga, The US Organization and Black Cultural Nationalism* by Scot Brown. These texts have contributed largely to the expansion of the Black Freedom Movement narrative. Additionally, the scholarship was foundational for the creation of the Black Power Studies subfield of political and historical study.}

Given the rich intellectual legacy of scholarship that has been dedicated in the past twenty years of foregrounding the Black Freedom Struggle, this special issue does not seek to replicate established scholarship or journal issues which have further developed the historical narratives of Black students/youth. Conversely, this introduction and the essays of this special issue seek to broaden the dialogue and historical investigations of marginalized narratives that may not acquiesce to the fit of Black Freedom Movement scholarship while promoting additional work on SNCC, the BPP, and campus rebellions at PWIs. The objectives of this special issue are to reclaim, reposition, and amplify the narratives of the Black Freedom Struggle which were largely responsible for its internationalization while capturing the reverberating effects of Black student/youth led organizations who boldly challenged structural inequality, systemic racism, political disenfranchisement, and anti-Black presence around the globe.\footnote{In the 2003 spring issue of the *Journal of African American History*, editor and scholar V.P. Franklin compiled a stellar ensemble of scholars representing the various disciplines of History of Education, Black Studies, Africana Studies, and History for a special issue entitled, “The History of Black Student Activism.” The issue produced seminal work from scholars such as: Dr. Peniel Joseph, Black Power Historian; Dr. Dionne Danns, History of Education scholar; and Dr. Stefan Bradley, scholar of African American Studies. The special JAAH issue, while advancing the deep history of Black student activism provided an opulent pathway for additional interest capturing the diverse history of Black Students/Youth. See: *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 88, No. 2, The History of Black Student Activism (Spring, 2003).}

A second reason for this special issue centered on Black students/youth is to expand the historical investigations of Black resistance beyond the markers of the early 1970s. The genealogy of Black student/youth resistance and political participation, beyond the socially accepted media anointed and embraced to describe the Civil Rights Movement was arguably driven by the charisma of individuals accompanied by a seemingly non-combative presence that the white mainstream found palpable. The era of Black Power and student rebellion brought a polarized and unaccepted era of media-driven vitriol, and the participants were equally demonized, all while openly challenging structural inequities on a global scale. Yet the decade of the 1970s and the subsequent decade of the 1980s are largely absent from the historical narrative of Black students/youth.
youth social justice protests, mobilizations, and political participation. In the edited scholarship of Dan Berger, *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, we are reminded that during the decade of the 1970s, social movements expanded, experimented, and were further internationalized under the threat of state repression. Black student/youth campus and community activity increased to find transnational solidarity in Pan Africanism, the New Left Movement, the American Indian Movement, Anti-Imperialist struggle, and increased campaigns to promote the aesthetic embrace of Blackness as beautiful while finding commonality in other Third World oppressed peoples struggling against the vestiges of colonialism.

Black student/youth mobilizing efforts of the 1970s created the anti-imperialist African Liberation Day demonstrations, the African Liberation Support Committee, the Center for Black Education of Washington, DC, the Peoples College of Atlanta and Nashville, the Student Organization of Black Unity of Greensboro, NC, the Nairobi School and Community Movement of East Palo Alto, CA, the Council of Independent Black Institutions, the founding of Black and Latin-X HipHop cultural expression and the first broad based coalition struggle against Apartheid in South Africa that later blossomed with the greatest international support in the 1980s. In addition, Black students were fighting against ongoing US imperialism that included struggles against the increasing cost of education and the neo-conservative realities of global inequality that pervaded the Reagan administration.

Recent works from scholars such as Jelani Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism* (2019) and Joshua M. Myers’, *We Are Worth Fighting For: A History of the Howard University Student Protest of 1989* (2019), provide the field with generous contributions of contextual evidence that a plethora of scholarship awaits production by forthcoming historians, education historians, Black Studies scholars, political scientists, Africana scholars and the like for a more extended historical representation of Black youth and student activism. In response to this task, this special issue of ZANJ provides prospects for an explication of suppressed historical moments such as the 1980s Black student/youth HipHop activism that was central to the founding of the “Stop the Violence Movement.” Along with this occurrence, Black students/youth of Hip Hop musical formations mobilized Anti-Apartheid organizing which resulted in political

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5 For scholarship that provides a significant history of Black/youth student involvement in the cultural, ethnic, curricular and pedagogical reframing of higher education, see the work of Martha Biondi, *Black Revolution on Campus*. See also, *The Black Campus Movement* by Ibram X. Kendi and for more contemporary history, see the work of scholar Joshua M. Myers, *We Are Worth Fighting For: A History of the Howard University Student Protest of 1989*. For a text that examines the impact of the Black campus and Black student/youth impact on ethnic studies see, *Mountain Movers: Student Activism & the Emergence of Asian American Studies*, edited by Russell Jeung, Karen Dong, Eric Mar, Lisa Hirai Tsuchitani and Arnold Pan.

education and curriculum development in the New York Public school system.\(^7\)

As such this special issue of *Zanj* promotes a significant intellectual base for scholarship specific to reshaping historical memory and contributions to radical and internationalist scholarship. This special issue contributes to the contemporary understandings of the overall Black Freedom Movement from the intersecting perspectives of history and education for current organizers, activists, scholar-activists, graduate students, political educators, and curriculum specialists aimed at developing broader interdisciplinary discussions of the complex and nuanced Black Freedom Movement.

The contributing scholars for this special issue of *Zanj* address these objectives and additional historical perspectives on matters of Black students and Black youth activism. Contributions such as Amanda J. Hall’s, “Black Consciousness Transforms Higher Education: South African Student Exiles on U.S. Campuses in the Movement Against Apartheid, 1976-1988,” discusses the role of South African youth and student exiles in the anti-Apartheid struggle of South Africa. Hall’s timely essay provides an often-discounted historical narrative which situates Black struggle transnationally while presenting a history of cross-continental Pan-African influence for Black youth and students within US borders. Joshua Myers resumes the scholarship from his groundbreaking book, *We Are Worth Fighting For*, with a historiographic account highlighting the role of critical reading circles and study for radical praxis amongst Black youth and students on college campuses in the 1970s and 1980s. Myers’s essay is produced in the legacy of fellow Howard University alum, Kwame Ture’s mantra of: ‘Study and Struggle’. As a legendary organizer and SNCC activist, Ture often relayed to Black activists as a constant the critical role of study and political education to achieve the maximum benefits of systemic change. Myers’s timely scholarship revisits and extends this instructional and pedagogical legacy of Black activism.\(^8\)

In “Movements Come and Go and are Soon Forgotten...’: The Black Campus Movement at Fayetteville State, 1966-1972,” scholar Francena Turner presents a unique essay on Black

\(^7\) See the work of Richard D. Benson II, *Fighting for Our Place in the Sun: Malcolm X and the Radicalization of the Black Student Movement*. Also, for a broader discussion on the history and developments of the Council of Independent Black Institutions, see the work of Russell Rickford, *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and Radical Imagination*. For a historical perspective on the developments of campus radicalism by Black students/youth during the latter 1960s and early 1970s, see the work of Martha Biondi, *Black Revolution on Campus*. For a ground-breaking text which historizes Black student/youth activism at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, see the work of historian Jelani Favors, *Shelter in a Time of Storm: How Black Colleges Fostered Generations of Leadership and Activism*.

\(^8\) Information referenced regarding the scholars and articles of this issue have been extrapolated from the forthcoming articles that comprise this special issue. For more information on the work of Josh Myers groundbreaking scholarship on the historic Black student protest movement at Howard University which occurred during the late 1980s and early 1990s, see, *We Are Worth Fighting For: A History of the Howard University Student Protest of 1989*. Regarding the political, cultural and activist position of Black students and youth in the struggle against imperialism and colonialism, see, “Carmichael Tells Students Stop Jivin” in SOBU Newsletter April 3, 1971. Content from this article was taken from a lecture Carmichael delivered to Black students at Cornell University in 1971. Stokely Carmichael informed the captive audience, “You have an obligation to your people – study, work”, he additionally relayed with emphasis, “be concerned with the problems of your people, study and analyze those problems…get serious about the situation and do some work for your people.”
activism at the HBCU, Fayetteville State University (FSU) of North Carolina. Turner explores the historical trajectory of student activism and protest activity at FSU from the pivotal struggle and social change years of 1966-1972. Turner grounds her essay in the oral historical methodology in the capturing of interviews with FSU alumni. These narratives and counter-narratives advance Turner’s objectives of presenting a lesser-known micro history while keeping much needed memory of FSU through her scholarship. Turner’s welcomed contribution to this special issue offers a reminder for prospective scholars to investigate unpopularized histories of Black youth and student life to achieve the objectives of expanding historical knowledge of the overall Black Freedom Movement.

In the concluding entry for this special issue, Fredrick Douglass Dixon, in “From Civil Rights to Black Power: The Hidden Histories of Black Community College Activism in Chicago,” offers a compelling and largely unknown history of Black students and youth in Chicago challenging the political ‘machine’ politics of Mayor Richard J. Daley during the 1960s. Dixon provides a much-ignored aspect of struggle with his critical history of higher education at the community college level. As a notable municipal hotbed for political struggle as witnessed during Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s time in the major metropolis, Chicago’s narratives of the Black Freedom Movement continue to emerge for prospective scholars. Dixon’s essay is a formative addition to this budding canon of Black ‘Windy City’ freedom struggle narratives.9

Conclusion

This introduction provides but a glimpse of the innovative scholarship which has been contributed to this special issue. Scholarship of the overall Black Freedom Struggle continues to produce historical narratives of the less popularized memories that were vital to the ‘glocal’ liberatory practices developed to challenge hegemony at multiple levels that include anti-imperial, anti-colonial, and anti-local/state sanctioned violence movements that were Diasporic in practice and theory.

The challenge of our work in this issue and forthcoming issues dedicated to Black students and youth will be for recognition, integration, and reformulation because of these more obscure histories. In the production of less popularized scholarship and as keepers of historical memory, prominent scholars such as historian Gerald Horne remind us that, “the fate of those now known as African Americans has been shaped indelibly by the global correlation of forces, or what older

scholars once termed the ‘motion of history’, and we ignore this reality at our peril.”

In the spirit of Horne’s statement, this issue acknowledges these forces while accepting the continual challenge of positing the historical narratives of Black students and youth which have contributed to the global Black freedom struggle.

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10 Gerald Horne, “One Historian’s Journey,” *The Journal of African American History* 96 (2011): 249; In this short biographical account, Gerald Horne provides an informative piece of which future historians can model for continuous advancement of the field. This special issue which was dedicated to the expansive scholarly contributions of Gerald Horne speaks to the breadth of his career and his evolution as a critical historian of global proportions. From this issue published by *The Journal of African American History*, see the introduction by Ula Taylor, “Introduction: The Shaping of an Activist Scholar” and see the contribution by scholar Erik McDuffie, “Black and Red: Black Liberation, The Cold War, and The Horne Thesis” to learn more about the historical and political perspectives of writing critical history.