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Competing Spatial Imaginaries and Counterinsurgency in the “Black Mecca”: A Case Study of
the Ron Carter Patrol

by

Kayla Edgett

Under the Direction of Katherine Hankins, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2022

ABSTRACT

In 1981, Black Atlanta residents organized an armed patrol—the Ron Carter Patrol—at Techwood Homes public housing project to defend their community against the threat of a serial killer, who had murdered over two dozen Black youth. Through archival research and in-depth, semi-structured interviews, I represent competing narratives of the patrol and highlight alternative socio-spatial imaginaries that challenge the myth of Black unity in Atlanta. Emerging from the ongoing social and political organization of residents, the existence and visibility of the patrol presented a threat to state power as the patrol challenged the “Black Mecca” imaginary. State and nonstate actors, primarily Black politicians and civic leaders, collaborated to enact counterinsurgency measures to suppress the spread of armed Black self-defense and to re-establish the state’s monopoly on violence. This case study helps expand understandings of the reproduction of racial capitalism and the imaginaries of resistance emerging from working-class Black communities.

INDEX WORDS: Black geographies, Self-defense, Counterinsurgency, Urban geography, Social activism, Self-determination

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2022

Competing Spatial Imaginaries and Counterinsurgency in the “Black Mecca”: A Case Study of
the Ron Carter Patrol

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May 2022

DEDICATION

For insurgents—past, present, and future.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AHA: Atlanta Housing Authority

APD: Atlanta Police Department

FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation

HUD: US Department of Housing and Urban Development

STOP Committee: The Committee to Stop Child Murders

Techwood: Techwood-Clark Howell Homes

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Ron Carter Patrol

From 1979 to 1981, Atlanta faced a horrifying series of kidnappings and murders that claimed the lives of thirty Black residents between the ages of 4 and 28, the majority of whom were poor and working-class children (Hobson, 2017; Kadalie, 2019). The Atlanta Child Murders, in part due to the efforts of the victims' mothers-turned-activists, drew national attention, eventually prompting action from the White House and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (Hobson, 2017). For many Black working-class and poor Atlantans, the state's slow response gave rise to anger at the seeming lack of attention by the city administration and federal government (Hobson, 2017; Wells & Field, 1981). In the decades prior, the acceleration of white flight was matched by a shift in public housing occupancy towards the very poor, while urban renewal, highway construction, and inadequate housing stock left many more poor residents behind (Hankins, et al., 2015; Keating, 2001). Meanwhile, middle-class Black residents were increasingly drawn to the suburbs, creating a spatial divide between working-class and middle-class Black residents (Grady-Willis, 2006; Hankins & Holloway, 2021). While Atlanta's first Black mayor, Maynard Jackson, governed the city through a rocky coalition throughout this period, deep class divisions came to the fore, as parents of the victims accused the administration of ignoring the plight of the poor and those in public housing where many of the kidnapped children lived (Baldwin, 1985; Hobson, 2017; Keating, 2001; Stone, 1989).

In March of 1981, at the height of the murders and three months before a suspect was arrested, residents of Techwood Homes, the oldest housing project in the U.S. and largest in Atlanta, contacted organizers from the Black Issues Community Forum, the Atlanta Junior College student movement, and Emmaus House, a social justice ministry and community center,

to ask for help in coordinating an armed community patrol to protect against kidnappings (C. Ward, personal communication, September 20, 2021; Hobson, 2017; Kadalie, 2019). Joint public housing tenant association leaders chose Techwood Homes as a testing ground for armed patrols. Not the only armed patrol at a public housing complex in Atlanta but certainly the most notable, the Ron Carter Patrol, named after a slain Black Panther Party member, was referred to in the press as the bat patrol after the organizers staged a press conference in March of 1981 displaying guns and bats (Kadalie, 2019). Modibo Kadalie, one of the organizers of the patrols, explained that patrollers no longer trusted the police and felt that they had to directly defend their community against the threat of kidnappings (Kadalie, 2019: 42). Seen by city hall as an open critique of the city administration and a public relations problem, the Ron Carter Patrol revealed a deep divide between the working-class and poor Black residents and the Black middle-class, business, and political elite of Atlanta (Hobson, 2017; Kadalie, 2019). Immediately, the patrollers faced repression from the city. For example, city officials asked the residents to discontinue the patrol and the Atlanta Police Department (APD) arrested at least four patrollers (Brown & Mooney, 198; Richardson, 1981a; Rodriguez, 2021; Willis & Rodrigue, 1981). Black political and civic authorities joined forces with city officials in condemning the patrol in the press (Clark, 1981; Field & Allen, 1981). Further, state and nonstate authorities sanctioned *unarmed* patrol groups composed of volunteers trained by the police, an act which further marginalized armed patrols (Maye, 1981a; Rawls Jr., 1981). Despite the repression, marginalization, and attempts by media to portray the patrollers as outside agitators, the patrols continued for weeks after media attention waned.

The purpose of this study is to analyze a case of armed Black self-defense in a Black-governed city in the United States in order to understand the limits and effectiveness of electoral

representation to contain resistance. Investigating repressive strategies in Atlanta can help scholars understand how a Black-governed city responds to Black working-class and poor autonomous community defense, uncovering a more complicated entanglement of race and class than the “Black Mecca” myth implies. The promotion of Atlanta as a hub for racial harmony and economic progress has relied on the existence of various socio-spatial dynamics in the city, including an influential Black middle and upper-class and elite Black enclaves, initiatives such as Forward Atlanta, which promoted a business-friendly image in the mid-20th century, the storied past of non-violent Civil Rights activism, and the ascendancy of Black politicians to office, such as the election of Maynard Jackson in 1973, the first in an ongoing run of Black mayors (Hobson, 2017). While Atlanta’s poor and working classes have identified with Atlanta as the “Black Mecca” throughout the 20th and early 21st century, they have also paradoxically critiqued this image (Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021; Hobson, 2017; Grady-Willis, 2006). The Ron Carter Patrol is relatively unexamined in the history of resistance to racism in Atlanta. Notably, it stands in contrast to the dominant non-violent civil disobedience framework that Atlanta is known for (see Brown-Nagin, 2012; Tuck, 2003; Sims-Alvarado, 2017). Indeed, in my reading, the public display of organized self-defense by Black public housing residents threatened the liberal place imaginary of Atlanta, which had long relied on class-blind narratives of racial harmony.

As Bledsoe (2017) argues, imaginaries of past resistance, such as marronage, effect how we struggle in the present, and what we imagine for the future. What forms of social justice struggles scholars pay attention to matters; what is documented, analyzed, and socialized through academic research can have lasting effects on imaginaries of resistance to racial capitalism and understandings of the racial capitalist state. As Black peoples in the U.S. continue to struggle against the oppression of racial capitalism, their struggles propose multiple strategies and visions

of liberation (Anderson & Samudzi, 2018; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe & Wright, 2019b; Winston, 2020). Through organizing against the violent imposition of racial capitalism, Bledsoe and Wright (2019a) argue, Black people uncover the link between anti-Blackness and capital accumulation and actively create alternatives to such violence. Indeed, Black self-defense has shaped the spatial organization of Atlanta from the armed resistance to white violence during the 1906 massacre of Black residents to the armed occupation of a South Atlanta business in the summer of 2020 (Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021). I follow Jordan (2014) in locating Black rage (and self-love) as revolutionary possibility and Pulido (2016) in locating revolutionary potential in populations cast as surplus.

The broad questions motivating this research include 1) What are the spatial strategies of racial capitalism and the state? 2) What are the spatial strategies of resistance to racial capitalism and the state? 3) In what ways is Black resistance repressed by the state? Instances such as the Ron Carter Patrol are sometimes left out of the popular imaginary of resistance to racism in Atlanta yet offer important insights about resistance to racial capitalism led by working-class and poor Black inhabitants (Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021). Investigating sites of armed Black resistance can help uncover spatial strategies and imaginaries for self-determination as well as uncover what state strategies are deployed at the local scale to reproduce racial capitalism. I look to the Ron Carter Patrol to ask: From what social, economic, and political context did this moment of resistance emerge? How and by whom was the patrol created? What socio-spatial imaginaries shape and emerge from this site? What were the discursive and carceral responses to this instance of Black self-defense?

Through archival research and in-depth, semi-structured interviews with participants, I represent the narrative of the Ron Carter Patrol as a militant claim to bodily and territorial

autonomy of Black agents¹ responding to gratuitous violence. This representation of the Ron Carter Patrol suggests an alternative socio-spatial imaginary at work, which challenges the myth of Black unity and draws class and ideological lines between Black people in Atlanta. Emerging from the ongoing social and political organization of Techwood Homes residents, the publicity of the patrol presented a threat to state power and capital accumulation through challenging the “Black Mecca” imaginary. State and nonstate actors, primarily Black politicians and civic leaders, collaborated to enact counterinsurgency measures to suppress the spread of armed Black self-defense and re-establish the state’s monopoly on violence.



Figure 1 Modibo Kadalie, Chimurenga Jenga, and Israel Green (left to right) at a press conference announcing the formation of the Ron Carter Patrol, March 1981.

(Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution via Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library)

¹ I use the term agent to stress that people (in this particular case and in cases throughout the long history of Black resistance) act on their own authority, implicitly or explicitly rejecting liberal subjecthood and the politics of representation.

1.2 Literature Review

Techwood and Clark Howell public housing projects, hereafter referred to just as Techwood, switched from segregated whites-only housing to majority Black-occupied by 1976, just eight years after the desegregation of Techwood began (Keating, 2001). To situate this working-class Black residential area where inhabitants faced economic and racial violence, I outline how racial capitalism shapes Black places and experiences through the ongoing accumulation of Black space (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019a; Gilmore, 2017; McKittrick, 2013), the production of racialized surplus populations (Chen, 2013; Pulido, 2016), and, in recent decades, neoliberal austerity and increased carcerality and penalty to control and contain Black bodies (Gilmore, 2007; Wacquant, 2009). Black geographies, as the terrain of political struggle (McKittrick, 2006), are also marked by rebellion, from marronage to modern-day riots (Stanley & Spade, 2012; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe and Wright, 2019b; Shirley & Stafford, 2015; Winston, 2020). Black people, through rebellion, present a threat to the racial capitalist state; therefore, they are pre-marked as insurgent, as seen through ongoing racialized criminalization of social deviance (Wacquant, 2005). Counterinsurgency, as a complex strategy of coercion and consent, becomes a key state approach to managing poor and working-class Black spaces, which are perceived as always insurgent (Williams, 2011; Camp, 2017; Camp & Greenburg, 2020). Below, I highlight the ways in which racial capitalism constructed the spaces and people of Techwood Homes and outline the history and practice of counterinsurgency against Black inhabitants engaged in resistance.

1.2.1 *Race and Capital: Neoliberalism, Surplus, and Carcerality*

In order to understand how racial capitalism produces Black geographies—and in particular a Black public housing project in 1981—I adopt a definition of race and racism, unpack some

broad dynamics of racial capitalism in reproducing race, and highlight the interconnections among neoliberalism, surplus populations, and carcerality.

Race is reproduced through processes of racial ascription creating complex webs of social hierarchies and group-differentiated vulnerability to death (Gilmore, 2017). Against the reification of race, I follow Chen (2013) that race “is the consequence and not the cause of *racial ascription or racialization processes* which justify historically asymmetrical power relationships through reference to phenotypical characteristics and ancestry” (“Addendum,” para. 1). Racism names the violent process of placing difference into hierarchies (Gilmore, 2002).

Scholarship of racial capitalism locates the historical and logical interconnections between racialization and capitalism. Cedric Robinson in his 1983 book *Black Marxism* coined the term racial capitalism to explain the co-constitution of race and capital. As opposed to theories such as “dual systems theory,” which understands race and capital as independent but overlapping logics, this unitary approach to race and capitalism posits that capitalism produces and reproduces race, and capital requires racialization to function. Because capital historically subsumed race, race is foundational to capitalism, both prior to and reproduced by capital (Robinson, 1983).

Historically, capitalism emerged through slavery and genocide, and capital’s dominance relies on the continual renewal of settler colonialism and white supremacy through the ongoing accumulation of land and labor (Wolfe, 2016). Anti-Black racism emerged violently through the appropriation of labor, as a strategy to justify slavery (Wolfe, 2016). Scholarship on Black geographies sheds light on the ways in which anti-Blackness is produced and reproduced on the American continent and how the process of Black racialization takes particular forms emerging

from slavery (Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe & Wright, 2019a; Chen, 2013; Hawthorne, 2019; McKittrick 2011; McKittrick, 2013).

The legacies of colonialism and slavery include the condemnation of spaces inhabited by Black people as inhuman, unlivable, without history, geography or “suitable capitalist life-support systems” (McKittrick, 2013: 7). The condemnation of Black spaces allows those spaces to serve as a basis of ongoing accumulation, a requirement for capital growth. Anti-Black racism is a prerequisite force for global capitalism that allows capital to constantly renew itself through the process of rendering Black spaces as open for occupation and appropriation (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019a). For example, Black spaces are cast as “empty” through gentrification and dispossession by accumulation (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019a). Bledsoe and Wright (2019a: 16) analyze the conditions of Ferguson, Missouri, which shifted from a white suburb to a majority Black suburb with white control, to situate gentrification within the larger “spatial fix” of global capital in which a “racial fix(ation)” treats certain places and populations as obsolete. Central to slavery and the ongoing oppression of Black people, Black populations are seen as a-spatial, “without land or home” (McKittrick, 2011: 948).

Further, Black people are cast as surplus within a global and local division of labor, specifically through the ongoing production of surplus populations, those repelled or excluded from the process of production (Chen, 2013; Pulido, 2016). While the production of surplus populations is inherent to capitalism (Chen, 2013), the state, as both a particular multi-scalar set of institutions governing society and as a complex social relation mediating between the governing and the governed, plays a key role in the reproduction of race (Lipsitz, 1995; Gilmore, 2002; Roy, 2019).² In effect the state fixes racial difference to maintain pacification and wield

² While a more thorough engagement with theories of the state is outside of the scope of this thesis, I follow Painter (2006) in defining the state as an “imagined collective actor in whose name individuals are interpellated

power over segments of society, through the recognition of some and exclusion of others (Gilmore, 2002).

While this process is historically and geographically variegated, in the U.S. in the late 20th century, neoliberalization merged with the situated racial logics of settler colonialism and white supremacy, reproducing those logics, as exemplified at the urban scale (Wacquant 2009; Wacquant, 2014; Pulido, 2016). Through decades of deindustrialization, job loss and austerity policies created a post-industrial precariat, politically overdetermined by a strong state which plays a central role in social and spatial production and the distribution of urban marginality (Wacquant, 2014). As the state shifted from social support to workfare and prisonfare, racial categorization and judicial sanction produced larger numbers of state outcasts (Wacquant, 2014). This state production of marginality and penalty aligns with the roll-out phase of neoliberalism outlined by Peck and Tickell (2002), in which neoliberalism shifts to produce new systems of control to manage the effects of the crisis of social reproduction unleashed on excluded and increasingly precarious populations.

The condemnation of Black spaces combines with the ongoing production of racialized surplus populations with deadly consequences. Pulido (2016) locates the logics and processes of anti-Black racism and capitalism working in tandem to produce vulnerability, contamination, and death. In Flint, Michigan, where the city water supply was poisoned beginning in 2014, the largely Black population of Flint, abandoned by capital through deindustrialization, whites through white flight, and the state through “organized abandonment” (Gilmore, 2008), were

(implicitly or explicitly) as citizens or subjects, aliens or foreigners, and which is imagined as the source of central political authority for a national territory” (758). While I use the terms “state actors” and “nonstate actors” to distinguish between people who were official state representatives and those who were state-recognized civic leaders, I contend that in response to the Ron Carter Patrol both groups were doing the work of the state as they mediated a return to hegemonic order.

viewed as disposable by city, state, and federal levels of government (Pulido, 2016). The largely Black population of Flint is disposed of as “surplus” and used as a testing ground for neoliberal strategies, as demonstrated by the appointment by the Michigan governor of an Emergency Fiscal Manager (EFM) to return the city to financial solvency at the expense of democratic decision making as well as the deliberate decision by the EFM to use the heavily polluted Flint River for the city’s water supply to cut costs (Pulido, 2016).

As racial capitalism continues to produce surplus populations, particularly through deindustrialization and neoliberal social policy, the carceral functions of the state are central to the creation of racialized and impoverished geographies, making and remaking place through criminalization, policing, and incarceration (Gilmore 2007; Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2014). Prisons become a catchall solution for social problems arising from increasing social insecurity under neoliberalism, leading to a massive prison boom from the 1980s on (Wacquant, 2009). Contrary to common-sense discourse that posits prisons as solutions to crime, Wacquant (2009) locates prisons as responses to “dislocations provoked by the social and urban retrenchment of the state and by the imposition of precarious wage labor as a new norm of citizenship for those trapped at the bottom of the polarizing class structure” (xv). The expansion of the penal state corresponds with the rise of neoliberalism; prisons are one way to warehouse surplus populations, discipline the working class, and reaffirm state power for the upper class (Wacquant, 2009).

As Gilmore (2007) and Wacquant (2009) assert, the state criminalizes social insecurity and deviance as it switches financial investment from welfare and education, the general social reproduction of the class, towards prisons and jails, rendering prisons the main public housing program in the U.S. Further, prisons not only absorb surplus populations, but also serve as a

“spatial fix” for capitalist crisis, consuming surpluses of land, capital, and state capacity, moving resources out of already-impooverished communities (Gilmore, 2007). One way the carceral functions of the state operate under neoliberalism is through counterinsurgency efforts which arise to prevent and manage rebellion, while casting whole populations as potential insurgents.

1.2.2 Counterinsurgency and Black Insurgency

With a recognition that Black geographies are not wholly defined by racial violence (McKittrick, 2011), I contend that the co-constitution of Black rebellion and state violence plays a key role in the shaping of Black geographies and Black peoples, who continue to assert their agency despite and against the spatial determinations of racial capitalism (Hunter & Robinson, 2018). Black people, as the basis for modernity yet constantly cast into exclusion (McKittrick, 2011), are continually repressed, not just in spectacular moments, but in everyday life. Williams (2011) defines repression as political: “it is the means the state uses to protect itself from political challenges, the methods it employs to preserve its authority and continue its rule” (82). Within racial capitalism, Black people, especially visibly poor and working-class Black people, are seen as a constant threat, treated as not just criminals by the state (Wacquant, 2005), but possible insurgents. Repression, in the form of counterinsurgency, logically precedes each moment of rebellion, in turn shaping (but not wholly defining) the possibilities and limitations of rebellion.

Across time and space, Black people assert their right to autonomy and self-determination through resistance against the violence of racial capitalism and the state (Anderson & Samudzi, 2018; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe & Wright, 2019b; Winston, 2020). Since its inception, the U.S. state and ruling class have been faced with ongoing revolt, from slave revolts to marronage, continuing through armed Black resistance during Reconstruction in the U.S. South, the creation of autonomous geographies, and the movement to abolish police and prisons

(Stanley & Spade, 2012; Shirley & Stafford, 2015; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe and Wright, 2019b; Winston, 2020). In response to rebellion, the state develops new repressive strategies, which then set off new waves of Black rebellion. The modern-day police force, for instance, which emerged from the practice of slave catchers in the U.S. South (Hadden, 2001), has seen multiple rounds of reform in response to rebellion. In response to these reforms, which have further entrenched police powers in the everyday lives of inhabitants (Kelling & Wilson, 1982; Wiggins, 2019) the Black working class and poor continue to resist ongoing police violence, leading to new forms of control and new forms of rebellion.

Black rebellion and resulting reforms in the 1960s reveal examples of this cycle. The combination of economic crisis and political crisis in the late 1960s set off a wave of rebellion and reform that reveals the co-constituted relationship between the state and rebellion and sets the stage for the current nature of permanent conflict between the state and Black urban inhabitants. While capitalist crises sought to resolve themselves through the spatial fix of deindustrialization, military Keynesianism in capital's golden era gave way to a permanent war economy (Gilmore, 2007; Wacquant, 2009). Globally and nationally, rebellions of all forms intensified during the 1960s, threatening to topple the hegemonic rule of the U.S. state. Riots in response to police brutality in Black communities in the U.S. were commonplace throughout World War II, intensifying between 1964 and 1972, with rebellions sparked by police violence in around 300 cities (Kelly, 2016). During this period, the police and the National Guard treated Black communities as war zones, deploying military weaponry and tactics developed in Vietnam to put down urban domestic insurrection (Kelly, 2016).

The crisis of state legitimacy arising in this period from resistance to the racial capitalist state necessitated the creation of new forms of social control to suppress rebellion, always

marrying the “carrot” with the “stick” (Williams, 2011; Camp, 2017; Camp & Greenburg, 2020). For example, even as civil rights reforms were passed in the 1960s, intense repression came down on Martin Luther King, Jr. as he increasingly turned towards more radical critiques of U.S. imperialism and the U.S.’s role in Vietnam. The state enacted reform to calm the rebellion, while actively repressing the radical wing, through attacks on Dr. King and, later, groups such as the Black Panther Party, to contain the rebellion (Camp, 2017). The state also moved to involve more Black elites in governance. Reed Jr. (1979) argues that capitalism and the state were reconfigured in the face of Black struggle in the U.S. in the mid-20th century. Black leaders, many of whom had gained public recognition through their involvement in the civil rights struggle, were positioned as representative leaders for what was ostensibly perceived as a homogenous Black constituency. In Atlanta, as elsewhere, Black political and civic leaders found themselves managing and repressing the ongoing Black resistance that brought them to power in the first place (Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021; Reed, Jr., 1979).

Community policing measures, which are sometimes presented as progressive reform, emerged simultaneously with militarization in the late 1960s and early 1970s in response to Black resistance (Camp 2017; Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016). For example, the Los Angeles Police Department launched the first special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team to raid the Black Panther Party headquarters in 1969; in the 1970s, the same department experimented with community policing efforts that involved gaining the “trust” of communities through charity and relationship-building to secure consent and enlist neighbors into policing efforts (Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016).

This combination of coercion and concessions, violence and consent, and “weeding opposition and seeding legitimacy” constitutes counterinsurgency (Williams, 2011: 82). The U.S.

Government Counterinsurgency Guide defines counterinsurgency (COIN) as, “comprehensive civilian and military efforts taken to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes” (Department of State, 2009: 2). The Guide suggests best practices: To “reinforce governmental legitimacy and effectiveness while reducing insurgent influence over the population [...] COIN strategies should be designed to simultaneously protect the population from insurgent violence; strengthen the legitimacy and capacity of government institutions to govern responsibly and marginalize insurgents politically, socially, and economically” (Department of State, 2009: 12).

While counterinsurgency is sometimes thought to arise from U.S military strategy throughout Latin America’s “dirty wars,” scholars trace the transfer of counterinsurgency tactics among domestic sites, Latin America, Vietnam, and, more recently, Afghanistan and Iraq (Williams, 2011; Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016; Kelly, 2016). This form of repression not only emerges in moments of crisis but continues during peace times to preserve “normalcy” (Williams, 2011). In the U.S., normalcy means white supremacist capitalist rule, and Black populations are cast as insurgents outside of any militant acts, leading to the criminalization of entire Black communities (Wacquant, 2005). This criminalization continues today with “broken-windows” policing, which emerged in the 1970s to respond to the rise in urban insecurity with preemptive policing meant to prevent possible future events, treating social deviance, such as disorderly street socializing, as criminal problems (Kelling & Wilson, 1982; Wiggins, 2019). Important to this study, this criminalization of deviance through preemptive policing originated in Atlanta. According to Wiggins (2019) increased foot patrols, public decency legislation, and the expansion of police in low-income urban neighborhoods were intended to create ideal conditions for economic development in the 1970s during Maynard Jackson’s mayoral terms.

While counterinsurgency efforts are ongoing, spectacular moments of rebellion reveal such tactics acutely. Decades of community policing and COIN operations in Black communities have led to a default state tactic of mediation with willing religious or social leaders, often accompanied by heavy repression against the most militant actors (Williams, 2011). In Oakland, California in 2009, for instance, after Oscar Grant, a Black man, was killed by a transit officer, the Coalition Against Police Executions (CAPE), a group of nonprofits and Black churches, denounced the ensuing riot and organized an alternative protest with their own security force. When attendees refused to disperse, organizers from CAPE actively worked with the police, withdrawing their own security, and allowing the police to enter the protest space to teargas and arrest protestors. When the rebellions continued despite this setback, police agencies targeted protest organizers (Williams, 2011).

Counterinsurgency against domestic Black population in the U.S., such as the actions in Oakland described above, operates within an ongoing process of the denial of Black people's claims to self-defense. Bledsoe (2021) contends that Black self-defense is conceptually impossible within the modern world. Antiblackness in the afterlives of slavery relies on gratuitous violence, the denial of Black self-possession, and assumed Black a-spatiality. Self-defense, or "the multiscalar claim of rights to one's own body, the creation of space, and spatial occupation," has been legally denied to Black people in the U.S., from the antebellum era to the present (Bledsoe, 2021: 3). Today, police, vigilante groups, and judicial entities act in "petty sovereign" capacities to prohibit Black self-defense through "unilateral, arbitrary decisions with state backing" (Bledsoe, 2021: 7).

Counterinsurgency reveals how the prohibition of Black self-defense includes and extends beyond such petty sovereign power of police, vigilante groups, and judicial entities.

Counterinsurgency deployed in response to the Ron Carter Patrol demonstrates how both state and non-state actors do the work of the state to deny Black people the right to self-defense and how the public display of Black self-defense is prohibited within a Black-governed city with a largely Black police force. Class and race intersect to segregate the interests of the Black elite from Black working class and poor people. In the case of the Ron Carter Patrol, the Black elite played a key role in the denial of self-defense to Black working-class and poor residents.

In the section that follows, I describe the research methodology, methods, and data I utilized to examine the socio-spatial imaginaries enacted through the Ron Carter Patrol and the role of counterinsurgency tactics in repressing the patrol and reasserting state authority.

1.3 Methodology, methods, and data

I employ a critical approach grounded in Black geographic thought and feminist research practices. Black geographic thought challenges us to think beyond violence as wholly defining Black worlds and to “uncover a collective history of encounter” to move from an analysis of race based on suffering to one based on human life (McKittrick, 2011: 948). Feminist research practice is grounded in social justice, recognizes the positionality of the researcher, and invites reflexivity and participant review of research (Hay & Cope 2021: 64). The impetus for analyzing this case of armed Black self-defense in an urban environment arose from my situated experience as an activist committed to Black liberation as well as my personal relationship with Modibo Kadalie, whom I first met in 2016 when he spoke at the annual Atlanta Radical Book Fair of which I am a co-organizer. The story of the Ron Carter Patrol runs counter to the stories often told of Black struggle in Atlanta: as opposed to representatives negotiating slow and peaceful progression towards full civil rights, this story involves determined claims to autonomy by armed public housing residents and violent retaliation from the state.

I look to the Ron Carter Patrol to understand Black agency and life-engendering place-making emerging within and beyond processes of dispossession and containment (McKittrick, 2011). Through this framing, we can see how emancipatory socio-spatial imaginaries and practices are immanently created in the process of struggle itself and how Black people assert their agency against the constraints of racial capitalism, rejecting both a-spatiality and containment (Anderson & Samudzi, 2018; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe & Wright, 2019b; Winston, 2020). I engage this qualitative case study specifically because it occurred under a Black administration in a majority Black city during the neoliberal turn. The rich level of detail possible in an intensive case study allows for credibility and transferability without collapsing this case study into an exact parallel with any other case study of resistance (Hay & Cope, 2021: 109-121).

Interviews with participants provided rich data on the social, economic, and political context as well as the socio-spatial imaginaries creating and emerging from the patrol. After conducting secondary research on the patrol and beginning archival research for background knowledge, I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews totaling four and a half hours and thirty-six pages of transcripts with two participants of the patrol: Modibo Kadalie and Natsu Saito. Saito, an activist and scholar, has spoken openly about her experiences with the Ron Carter Patrol in a documentary (Bennett et. al, 2020). A lifelong activist and scholar of anarchism, social ecology, and pan-African liberation struggles, Kadalie provided the impetus for this project and engaged me in ongoing reflexive discussion.

I used opportunist sampling (Hay & Cope, 2021: 100) to contact additional research participants familiar with the Ron Carter Patrol. I conducted an hour-and-a-half in-person interview with Columbus Ward, longtime south Atlanta activist who worked at Emmaus House

with an arrestee of the Ron Carter Patrol, Gene Ferguson. While Ward only participated in the patrol for one day, he provided context for understanding relationships among patrol organizers as well as the general political climate in Atlanta during Maynard Jackson's first two mayoral terms. Additionally, I conducted approximately eleven hours of phone interviews with Kadalie, James Freeman, and Dennis Goldstein, totaling eight pages of interview notes. I spoke at length with Freeman, a longtime housing advocate and 25-year employee of Economic Opportunity Atlanta, a quasi-governmental nonprofit, for background information on debates surrounding public housing in the early 1980s and details of his encounters with the late Marion and Israel Green, presidents of the Techwood Homes tenant association and key organizers of the patrol. Goldstein, a lawyer and tenant rights activist, provided details on tenant organizing, particularly the relationships among tenant association leaders in Atlanta from the late 1960s through the 1990s. I invited participant checking through ongoing discussion with participants as well as inviting Kadalie and Saito to review this manuscript.

A major limitation of this project is the lack of Black women's voices in the process, especially considering the centrality of Black women such as Marion Green. I spent several months attempting to schedule interviews with Black women participants of the patrol to no avail. A well-documented result of the destruction of public housing such as Techwood Homes is the displacement of residents (Hankins, et al., 2015). Further, forty years after the event, Mrs. Green, and other participants, are now deceased. Considering this limitation, reviewing archival documents and news accounts allowed me to locate speech from Black women tenants. Mrs. Green was the only Black woman patrol participant quoted by the media. Other Black women were quoted by media disparaging or expressing concern about the patrol (see Chapter 3); their identities were weaponized to discredit other Black women participants. I include these voices,

recognizing the plurality of Black geographic imaginaries and imaginaries of resistance (Bledsoe & Wright, 2019b).

I analyzed news and opinion articles pertaining to the Ron Carter Patrol from the *Atlanta Journal*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, and the *Atlanta Daily World* from late 1980 through 1982. I located twenty-two articles in the digital archives of *The Atlanta Constitution* (which also houses *The Atlanta Journal*), three in the digital archives of *The Atlanta Daily World*, seven from the personal papers of Lorraine Fontana held at the Special Collections and Archives at Georgia State University, and four from the Atlanta Housing Authority (AHA) archives. Further, I located seven national news articles from *The New York Times*, *The Boston Globe*, *Time Magazine*, and *The Washington Post* digital archives. In total, I cite forty-two news and opinion articles.

From *The Tenants News*, the largest circulated paper for public housing in Georgia produced by the AHA, I reviewed forty-four pages across twelve editions from August 1980 to September/November 1981 (one edition per month, except for June, July and August of 1981 in which editions were not produced, and with a special tenant association election edition in October of 1980). I also examined twenty-two pages of internal documents from the AHA, including a press release, the United Tenant's Council articles of incorporation, and a background document on modernization at Techwood. In the Lorraine Fontana papers, I searched through six folders totaling over a hundred pages of news clippings, notes, and flyers related to the Atlanta Child Murders for all references to the Ron Carter Patrol.

I approached the archives critically, working closely with Kadalie to reconstruct the narrative as accurately as possible when newspaper or AHA newsletter reports conflicted with his or Saito's recollection. I chose not to trust every detail of newspaper reports because my own

experience as an activist has taught me that reporters, from their own situated position, often misunderstand or offer necessary partial accounts of events. *The Tenants News* was produced by a quasi-governmental body and did not necessarily represent the diverse voices of the tenants. When some conflicting accounts arose, such as the centrality of Black women in the patrol, I chose to trust Kadalie and Saito who were intimately involved and could account for how and why Black women's voices were largely left out of the official accounts. I also triangulated data by consulting Goldstein, Freeman, and Ward and cross-referencing news articles to verify details of events.

In Chapter Two I primarily focus on the context and socio-spatial imaginaries of the patrol, and thus most heavily utilize interview responses and speech of participants found in news articles. I coded interview transcripts and participant speech according to both descriptive codes (motivations, the state, nonstate actors, race, gender, greater political context, media, and events) and analytic codes (self-determination, authority, fear, division, distrust, territorial control, gender roles, responsibility, identity, and solidarity). The analytic codes emerged both from existing literature that theorizes Black self-defense (Anderson & Samudzi, 2018; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe & Wright, 2019b; Bledsoe, 2021; Shirley & Stafford, 2015; Winston, 2020) and iteratively from the research process.

In Chapter Three I primarily focus on the actions and speech of state and nonstate actors engaged in repressing the patrol. To gather background information about the historical, social, and economic context from which each site emerged as well as determine the actions taken by the state in response, I conducted primary archival research of news articles and official AHA documents. These sources provided insight into the actions and speech of state and nonstate actors engaged in repressing the patrol, such as how the state perceived the participants and what

discursive and carceral strategies state and nonstate actors deployed in response. State actors included those acting in an official capacity as representatives of municipal government, including members of the mayoral administration and police representatives. Nonstate actors included those representing civic and political organizations as well as those speaking on their own authority who had no known official positions in municipal or other governments. I coded these texts according to the following themes: paternalism and legitimacy, fear, cooperation, consent, opposition, and direct repression. Each theme arose from existing literature on repression and counterinsurgency as outlined above (Bledsoe, 2021; Camp, 2017; Camp & Greenburg, 2020; Gilmore & Gilmore, 2016; Kelly, 2016; Williams, 2011).

1.4 Contributions

As I discussed in section 1.2, scholars of critical human geography have examined how racial capitalism shapes the spatial organization of people and land, how capital reproduces and requires race, and especially anti-Blackness, how Black peoples resist the horrors of racial capitalism, how counterinsurgency emerges as state strategy to contain Black rebellion, and how Black self-defense is prohibited. To be Black in public, and especially to be visibly working-class or poor, is to be perceived by the state as always already insurgent (Wacquant, 2005). The denial of Black humanity necessitates the denial of Black self-defense, defined as claims to self-possession, spatial production, and occupation (Bledsoe, 2021). Yet, Black populations continue to employ self-defense within and outside recognized social movements (Bledsoe, 2021).

I explore the patrol at multiple geographic scales. Displayed in Figure 1, I begin at the intimate scale of the body. The collective organization of the patrol took place at the scale of the neighborhood, with some sites, such as a living room and sidewalks playing key roles. The patrol

received local and national media attention, which activated and highlighted competing imaginaries of Atlanta. All of this takes place within a racial capitalist state, within a national and global racial division of labor and life. The formation of the Ron Carter Patrol suggests that alternative social and spatial imaginaries were at work as participants asserted bodily and spatial autonomy through self-defense and mutual aid.

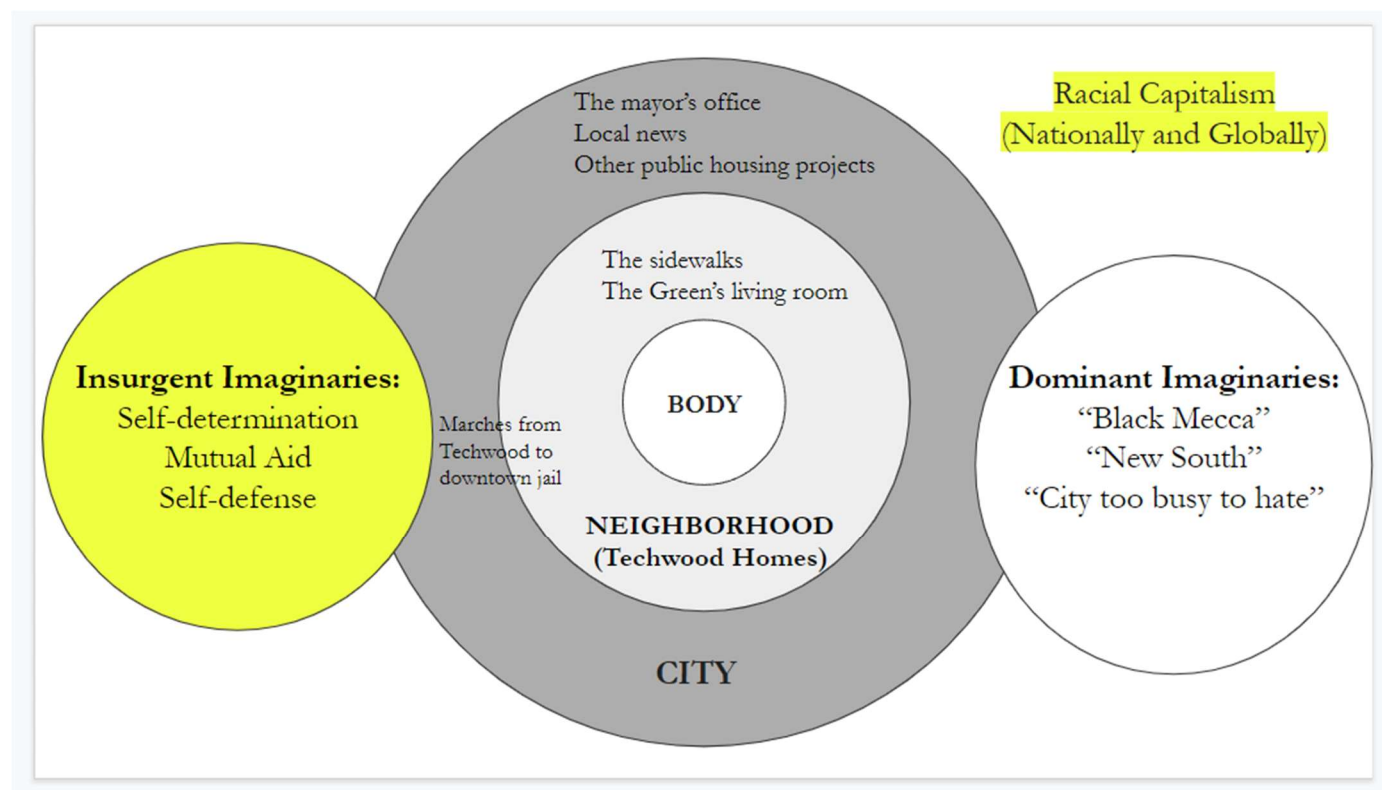


Figure 2 This project engages multiple scales and imaginaries

In Chapter 2 titled “Insurgency” I situate the emergence of the Ron Carter Patrol within a climate of fear, distrust, and division during the Atlanta Child Murders. I explore tenant association organizing within the neoliberal turn to reveal the role of Black women’s praxis and socio-spatial self-determination within and beyond the patrol. I argue that the actions and speech of patrol participants reflects an alternative understanding of authority, territory, identity, and gender roles. In contrast to the popular imaginary of Atlanta as the “Black Mecca” and “city too

busy to hate”—an imaginary in which the Black working and poor classes follow the leadership of the Black elite in a careful and slow process of resistance to white supremacy—the patrol revealed inhabitants’ sharp perceptions of race and class differences and their willingness to act on their own authority, outside of the official channels of dissent or protection.

Analyzing the repression of the Ron Carter Patrol uncovers how the prohibition of Black self-defense—within a Black-governed city with a majority Black population—crossed racial lines. In Chapter 3, titled “Counterinsurgency,” I detail the actions of state and nonstate elites, both Black and white, before, during, and after the Ron Carter Patrol, to represent the counterinsurgent repression. Elites and influential public actors rely on hegemonic notions of state power as they collaborate to secure pre-emptive consent for state repression, offer concessions to the patrollers, weed opposition to the patrol, and position *unarmed* patrols as the only acceptable form of civilian participation in defense. The effect of these actions is to deny legitimate claims to self-defense by Black public housing residents and activists and to further entrench state power and uphold racial capitalism.

The Ron Carter Patrol was just one spectacular moment within a longer trajectory of militant activism from Atlanta’s Black working-class and poor (see Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021; Grady-Willis, 2006; Kadalie, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021). Yet, this moment can expand our understanding of the reproduction of racial capitalism and imaginaries of resistance emerging within working-class and poor Black communities. During the neoliberal turn, as the state became more involved in the everyday lives of civilians, counterinsurgency proliferated as a strategy to contain and control Black communities. Importantly, in the “Black Mecca,” the face of counterinsurgency has often been Black. To resist the destabilizing effects of anti-Blackness

(Bledsoe, 2021) and understand imaginaries and practices of militant resistance, scholars must attend to complicated and often messy entanglements of class, race, space, and the state.

2 INSURGENCY

To understand the social, economic, and political context from which the Ron Carter Patrol emerged, as well as the imaginaries that shaped and emerged from the patrol, in this chapter I represent the various narratives of the patrol. Utilizing news articles, original interviews, secondary research, and AHA archives, I find that the existence of the Ron Carter Patrol reflected a climate of fear, increased class tensions, distrust of the state, and complicated feelings towards the police. Interviews and speech from patrollers found in newspaper articles shows that the patrol emerged from strong bonds between tenants, tenant-activists, and “outside” activists as well as women’s leadership. The patrollers asserted a feminist ethics of mutual aid and an insistence on social and spatial self-determination.

This chapter discusses the climate of fear and distrust exacerbated by the child murders and contextualizes the self-organization of public housing residents in the neoliberal turn of the late 1970s. I discuss the political organization of the Techwood Homes tenants before and during the patrol to foreground the leadership of Black women and the role of feminist ethics and to show that the patrol reflected notions of socio-spatial self-determination at intimate scales. I contextualize the patrol within ongoing political and social organizing to argue that while the patrol did not seek to directly contend with the state, the socio-spatial actions of the patrol organizers, through and beyond the patrol, asserted their claim to autonomy. This assertion threatened the image of Atlanta as a progressive, racially harmonious “New South” city in which Black inhabitants dutifully obey the authority of (Black) state representatives.

2.1 Fear, division, and distrust

The rash of murders that swept Atlanta from 1979 to 1981 created a climate of fear and exacerbated intra-racial class tensions amongst Black Atlantans. The thirty Black victims, aged 4

to 28, were from working-class and poor backgrounds and often presented as “hustlers and runaways” by the city’s administration (Hobson, 2017, p. 96-97). Modibo Kadalie, long-term activist and one of the patrol organizers, explains that Techwood tenants were fearful that their children would be “snatched off the street” (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). Kadalie himself, an adult then, stopped his usual habit of going for runs at night. Natsu Saito, another long-term activist and patrol organizer, similarly noted that Techwood residents were on “high alert”. Saito explains that before the patrol was organized residents throughout public housing projects were watching from their windows for suspicious outsiders, sometimes sitting with shotguns at their sides (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Fearful of violence and lacking confidence that the Maynard Jackson mayoral administration was devoting full resources to stopping the murders, residents began taking matters into their own hands (Dart & Field, 1981).

In May of 1980, Camille Bell and other mothers of victims formed the Committee to Stop Children’s Murders (STOP Committee), a network connecting the parents of murdered and missing children. The STOP Committee publicly criticized Black elites in governing positions, including Mayor Maynard Jackson and police chief George Napper, accusing them of ignoring the plight of poorer Black residents, and the committee questioned the capabilities of the city’s police force (Hobson, 2017, p. 101-108). As the STOP Committee’s criticism publicly uncovered the growing tension between the Black elite and working and poor classes, the city launched a sustained campaign against the group, going so far as to investigate the mothers for murder, accuse them of corruption, and launch a financial investigation into the group concerning financial accounting (Hobson, 2017, p. 110-117).

As public criticism grew, the Black elite also worked hard to repress the public airing of racial divisions, believing that discourse of racial motivations threatened the image of the Atlanta as “the city too busy to hate” at exactly the time when the city had grown into an economic center (Clark, 1981; Robinson, 1981; Wells & Field, 1981). Adding to this desire to detract from racialized discourse was likely the recent memory of Maynard Jackson’s rocky first mayoral term. After coming to power through a novel coalition of Black voters and white middle-class neighborhood activists, Jackson, the first Black mayor of Atlanta, initially championed affirmative action and neighborhood influence on city hall, a move which alienated both some older Black political leaders who were accustomed to a patronage style of governance as well as the white business elite who previously enjoyed greater access to city hall and were then embroiled in political battles with the neighborhood activists. Towards the end of his first term, Jackson shifted his governance strategy and worked to recompose the old governing bloc by more closely allying himself with downtown business interests (Keating, 2006; Stone, 1989). Despite wishes of the administration and the political, civic, and business elite to quiet discussions of race to foster a better climate for race relations and ultimately business profits, belief that the killer or killers were white, and potentially members of the Ku Klux Klan, was widespread (Hobson, 2017, p. 95-98). City officials and Black political leaders went to the newspapers to condemn any talk of racial motivation. State legislator Tyrone Brooks, representing a coalition of Black elected officials, civil rights leaders, and community groups, condemned talk about racial motivations as “irresponsible rhetoric” (Clark, 1981: 6). Additionally, he condemned the STOP Committee for “fraudulent fundraising” and the Ron Carter patrol for “misleading people” into “vigilantism” (Clark, 1981). Mayor Maynard Jackson also reported the “the police have no indication that cases ‘are or are not racially inspired’” and

“urged people not to speculate on the issue” (Wells & Field, 1981: 9A). Chimurenga Jenga, activist, patrol organizer and then-husband of Saito, clarified that he believed the killings were racially motivated regardless of the race of the killer/s, because “racism in this society has set up the black community to be a defenseless and powerless target” (Wells & Field, 1981: 1A).

In addition to growing class and race divisions, some Black activists openly expressed their dissatisfaction and distrust of the police. Jenga expressed a lack of faith in the police’s ability to stop the kidnappings, stating, “For 20 months, the police have not caught one person. They have not come up with one intelligent clue. [...] They are totally alienated from the community (Wells & Field, 1981: 1A). Others believed that the police may have been culpable for some or all the kidnappings. Saito recalls, “[the police] seemed like great candidates for people who could be in the community without creating particular suspicion and that kids might trust—or fear. Kids might go with. So, I remember there being widespread feeling that this could easily be the police” (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Ward similarly recounted widespread belief that the killer could be a white police officer (C. Ward, personal communication, September 20, 2021). The suspicion of the police transcended racial lines, as some believed that Black police officers were more threatening than white ones (Hobson, 2017, p. 99). Jenga summed up the sentiments of some Black residents, stating “[the police] only exist to do two things: one, to protect rich people’s property; and two, to keep poor people in their own communities, outside the downtown area...Protect the rich and confine the poor” (Wells & Field, 1981: 1A).

The actions and discourse of Black Atlanta residents reflect an understanding of anti-Blackness grounded in gratuitous violence and denial of self-defense. Jenga’s speech suggests that the police’s role is to contain poor people in spaces they inhabit while denying them

protection from violence. Jenga and others denied the request to stay silent about class and race motivations for the lack of attention to the child murders and the lack of protection awarded to Black Atlanta residents. While state actors threatened and attacked Black organizers that openly critiqued or defied the state, organizers continued to coordinate to secure resources and defend themselves against the gratuitous violence of the killer or killers.

Despite this distrust and fear of police, the actions of the patrol organizers reflect a nuanced relationship with the Atlanta police. Both Saito and Kadalie explain that the goal of the patrol was not to accost suspects themselves, but to alert the police of suspicious activity. Saito explains that Techwood residents felt a sense of solidarity with some Black police officers and officials, especially those who had grown up on the west side of Atlanta near the public housing project:

There wasn't such a huge distance between the folks of the community and those officials, I think, as there might be now. Just because the city was smaller. These were people who had been around. They knew each other. Eldrin Bell had been the first black police officer in the neighborhood that Chimurenga grew up in. So, the people in the community knew him, and in some senses, they felt themselves to be on the same side. Not entirely, but there was a certain kind of kinship there with, "Here's the first black police officer we have in our community, and even though he's the police, we also have to try to protect him." A funny sort of a dynamic there. And also, of course, the expectation that he would act in the community's interest. (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

This tension between distrust of the police in general and a sense of solidarity with Black police officials was expressed in the plan for the patrol. While patrollers planned to call the police upon

spotting suspicious people at the complex, they also intended to defend themselves if the police did not show up (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). In recognizing that police may not show up if they called about a suspicious person in the neighborhood, the patrollers understood that their public housing complex was a space outside of state protection. In their intention to defend themselves in the absence of state protection, they laid claim to collective defense of their bodies and the space they inhabited.

The fear and distrust expressed by Black working-class residents during the child murders was grounded also in situated experiences of public housing residents during the neoliberalization of city politics and public housing policies. The organization of the Ron Carter Patrol emerged from networks of trust between activists and residents that were built through years of organizing against the city and the AHA.

2.2 The neoliberal turn

Class tensions between the Black working class and Black political elite in Atlanta did not suddenly appear at the height of the child murders. Rather, these tensions occurred against the backdrop of profound changes that shaped the nation in the 1970s. The racial composition of government shifted as Black politicians came to occupy key offices in Atlanta, and simultaneously, neoliberalization emerged to replace ideas of Keynesian social welfare, leading to declining material and discursive support for the poorest residents (Wacquant, 2009). Further, years of urban renewal around, but crucially not in, public housing developments created stark spatial inequalities: “a central business district that is an overinvested, fortified white area surrounded by isolated, disinvested Black areas” (Rodriguez, 2021: 149). In Atlanta, as the first Black mayor worked to restore city hall’s close relationship with the white business elite, Black public housing residents waived in their support of Jackson (Hobson, 2019; C. Ward, personal

communication, September 20, 2021; M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). Simultaneously, these austere approaches to public housing spurred shifts in resident organizing in Atlanta, while disinvestment and attempts to demolish Techwood were met with political organizing from tenants and association leaders.

Nationally, public housing was hit hard by disinvestment, the shift in responsibility from federal to state agencies, and the turn from welfare to workfare (Rodriguez, 2021). As public housing lost middle and working-class residents and included mostly poor and Black people, public housing came to be associated with the “undeserving” poor. Discourse about public housing residents and welfare recipients shifted towards condemnation, blame, and criminalization, as “the War on Poverty was turning into the War on the Poor” (Rodriguez, 2021, p. 145-148). As austerity led to a decline in infrastructure and neoliberal politicians employed racialized discourse to blame residents for poverty, calls for the demolition of public housing and the dispersal of residents grew louder (Rodriguez, 2021, p. 148).

In Atlanta, public housing tenant activism extended beyond tenants’ issues to citywide political issues. Despite similar desires for improvements in public housing, the tenant associations represented diverse political views. Mayor Maynard Jackson, who had supported striking sanitation workers during his term as vice mayor, faced controversy in 1977 after he broke a four-day strike by firing the 900 unionized city sanitation workers, the majority of whom were Black (Hobson, 2017, p. 98-103). The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, joining the chorus of support including Martin Luther King, Sr., the Atlanta Urban League, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, released a statement in support of Jackson’s actions that listed the citywide Advisory Council on Public Housing (ACPH) as a signatory. In response, ACPH members formed a committee to release a separate statement retracting their support. When

Rebecca English, the president of the ACPH, wrestled back control and publicly condemned the anti-Jackson statement, she was promoted by Jackson to the AHA's Board of Commissioners. Two years later, a split in the ACPH materialized when tenants of eight projects, including English of Bankhead Courts, and members of Techwood, Perry, Capitol and Carver Homes, formed a separate intra-tenant association, the United Tenant's Council (UTC). The UTC set out to focus on service provision in the projects given the gaps left by the AHA's austerity policies (Rodriguez, 2021, p. 139-142).

At the same time as intra-project organization was recomposing, public housing in Atlanta was facing severe disinvestment, and tenants and AHA staff were fighting back against AHA management. For over a decade, tenants and tenant association leaders had organized together in Tenants United for Fairness (TUFF) and Welfare Rights Organization (WRO) to push for better treatment of tenants by the AHA and quicker action on tenant complaints (D. Goldstein, personal communication, January 2, 2022). After funding cuts from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the AHA was forced to reorganize its funds, resulting in staff losses and reorganization, which affected maintenance, management, and administrative staff (Goolrick, 1981). Tenants and maintenance staff organized against disinvestment, such as through a sick-out staged by AHA staff in October of 1980 (*Tenants News*, October 1980b). Tenants organized strikes, and in one instance locked AHA staff out of their offices with chain locks (J. Freeman, personal communication, September 12th, 2021).

In the spring of 1981, around seventy people, half of whom were maintenance workers and half of whom were Black women tenants, attended an AHA Board of Commissioners meeting. After hours of waiting, one man asked to the crowd, "It's eleven-fifteen, do you know where your board members are?", a reference to public service announcements reminding

parents to be vigilant during the child murders. Someone responded, “First President Reagan’s trying to take away my food stamps, and now they’re trying to take away my job!” (Goolrick, 1981: G18). AHA maintenance staff and tenants clearly connected public housing disinvestment with neoliberalization and the child murders. After tenants and workers waited for two hours, the board appeared for ten minutes before being escorted out by a police officer. Their proposal to fire 134 maintenance workers and 117 administrative workers went into immediate effect (Goolrick, 1981).

Techwood residents found themselves at the frontlines of the battle against the demolition of and disinvestment from public housing. The 56-acre complex, bordered by Coca-Cola’s new international headquarters, dormitories for the Georgia Institute of Technology (separated with a wire fence), a major highway interchange, and an intracity train station, sat on valuable land (Goolrick, 1981). As early as 1971, Coca-Cola’s CEO presented a proposal to the head of Central Atlanta Progress, an organization of Atlanta’s downtown business elite, to demolish Techwood to build middle-income apartments and a shopping mall (Keating, 2001). In 1981, a coalition of Black and white businessmen in Atlanta were in discussions with tenants, the AHA, and HUD officials about buying the project, razing the buildings, and redeveloping the land to attract higher income residents (Goolrick, 1981). The Housing Authority laid off nearly half of the maintenance staff for the complex of over 1200 units in 1981, while HUD paradoxically granted over 17 million dollars for the project to renovate its heating system and complete other major repairs (Goolrick, 1981).

As tensions between tenants and AHA management were exacerbated by funding cuts, Techwood tenants were self-organizing outside of official AHA channels. For instance, the tenant association, primarily led by Black women, recognized the pending encroachments on

Techwood and began organizing to get the project listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 to protect it from demolition (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). And in 1980, when the AHA called for city-wide public housing tenant association elections, Techwood Homes tenant association president Israel Green stated publicly to the *Tenant News* that Techwood would not run elections that year (*Tenants News*, October 1980c). Yet, when they did run elections a few months later, possibly in response to the AHA Board of Commissioner's resolution to withhold security deposit interest payments to any tenant association that had not hosted "open and free elections at least every two years," Green won by a large margin (*Tenants News*, October 1980a: 4; *Tenants News*, January 1981). The initial decision to not cooperate with AHA mandated elections appeared to reflect a disdain for democratic practices. However, the combination of tenant-led organizing and the popular mandate for Mr. Green reflects a *different* understanding of democratic practices. For some tenants, democracy was self-determined, not imposed by the bureaucratic AHA. The tenant association's practice of autonomous decision-making and organizing laid the groundwork for collective self-defense outside of—and in defiance of—the wishes of the city and the AHA.

2.3 Patrol organization

In October of 1980, as public housing residents throughout the city faced fiscal austerity, discursive criminalization, the repression of political organizing, and the ongoing child murders, a boiler at the daycare center in Bowen Homes exploded, killing four children and one adult (Hobson, 2017, p. 108). The explosion further intensified and made visible class and racial tensions within the city. In the aftermath of the boiler explosion, Black public housing residents connected the boiler explosion with the child murders, believing that both were the result of a

campaign of terror against poor Black residents (Hobson, 2017, p. 108). Saito points to this explosion as a catalyst for the Ron Carter Patrol:

There was a lot of concern, of course about the missing and murdered children and the fact that the kids in the housing projects were still vulnerable. What I remember as sort of the turning point in this was when the daycare center in Bowen Homes blew up, when the boiler blew up in the daycare center. And after that the way I heard it was that there were rumors that white men had been seen on the roof of the daycare center before it blew up and there was a lot of fear and suspicion about people coming into the community and you know, engaging in terrorist acts of one sort or another, and so there were people who were armed, who were looking out for the community, but what this meant at that time was people you know, like people with shotguns in apartment windows, looking out for suspicious looking people on the street. (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021)

The boiler explosion was viewed by some tenants as an intentional attack on the children of public housing. Whether or not this was true, the explosion was indicative of a pattern of neglect for public housing.

Saito explains that the idea for an organized patrol emerged out of a meeting with multiple tenant association leaders present. Afraid of the potential for misplaced acts of violence or individual responses as seen after the Bowen Homes explosion, the tenant association leaders sought to formalize and collectively organize the defense. Saito explains that the patrol would have multiple roles, both armed and unarmed: “The people who had firearms would only be those who were trained in firearms use. And there would be other people who didn't have firearms but would be in communication with each other with walkie talkies [...] and who would

engage in these patrols and look out for the community” (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Patrol organizers sought to self-determine who would carry arms and who would play other roles in the defense; bearing arms was not elevated above other roles in the patrol.

Techwood was chosen as a test site for the patrol because of its level of internal socio-political organization. The Techwood Homes tenant association, led by Marion and Israel Green, was seen as the most organized of the tenant associations (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Though it was later rebranded by the press as the “bat patrol,” activists and residents named the effort the Ron Carter Patrol in honor of a slain Black Panther Party member who they believed had been assassinated by the state due to his political activity (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). The organizers of the patrol, including Mr. and Mrs. Green at Techwood Homes and Gene Ferguson of Emmaus House, knew Ron Carter through organizing together for welfare rights (C. Ward, personal communication, September 20, 2021).

While the few existing written accounts of the Ron Carter Patrol focus on the patrol at Techwood (Hobson, 2017; Kadalie, 2019; Rodriguez, 2021), patrols in fact spanned multiple public housing complexes. A news article from March 20, 1981, reported that the Capitol Homes’ tenant association seven-member board voted unanimously to establish an armed patrol and suggested that Bowen Homes was considering adding one as well (Willis & Field, 1981). Two days later, an Atlanta police officer claimed Bowen residents had stationed armed guards in cars along the streets (Dart & Field, 1981). Carrie Copeland, president of the Capitol Homes tenant association, who complimented the mayor, chief of police, and deputy chief of police for their investigative work around the child murders, was quick to point out, “But they don’t live out here and we do, and nothing (no child killing) is happening in their communities” (Willis &

Field, 1981: 28A). Israel Green, Techwood tenant association leader and patrol organizer, reported that at least three other complexes had armed patrols while several other had expressed interested in forming one (Wells & Field, 1981). In the days before the Ron Carter Patrol began, it was clear that public housing residents, afraid of violent intruders and unconfident in the state's abilities, were beginning to take self-defense into their own hands.

2.4 Insiders/Outsiders

Once Techwood Homes was selected as an initial site for the formal organization of a patrol, Israel and Marion Green, president and former president, respectively, of the Techwood tenant association, called on outside activists to assist in the organization of the patrol. Kadalie identifies unity around a critique of the Black city administration as a core reason why the Greens reached out to the network of activists that included Saito and Kadalie.

The reason they called us is because they saw us as a force that was against the policies of the Black administration, the Maynard Jackson administration. And they were clear about how this administration's police force wasn't protecting them. So, they turned to us for support, and we had a meeting with the Techwood tenant association, Mr., and Mrs. Green, in their living room at their apartment. (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021)

Saito similarly points to the track-record of political organizing as a reason why non-resident activists were invited in to form the patrol, explaining, "They were involved in attempts to desegregate the university system and in the school bus driver strike and in the taxi drivers strikes and in all kinds of labor organizing issues and community, whatever was affecting people on the ground" (N. Saito, August 13, 2021). Saito explains that the activists had built trust with the tenant association by assisting with efforts to get Techwood listed on the National Register of

Historic Places. She shared that she always felt welcome, as a young non-Black woman who did not grow up in the area, and that other residents understood that the activists were “with the Greens” (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

This partnership between activists and tenants rejects a simple territorial understanding of community. Kadalie and Saito both point to intimate connections among patrol organizers who lived outside the complex and tenants. Jenga, for instance, who happened to grow up near but not in Techwood Homes, knew Mr. Green through an organization of veterans. Patrol organizer Gene Ferguson knew Mrs. Green through her longtime activism for welfare and tenants right beginning in the 1970s (C. Ward, personal communication, September 20, 2021). The Welfare Rights Organization (WRO) and Tenants United for Fairness (TUFF) brought together public housing tenant leaders with other welfare rights advocates, and Mrs. Green, as a member, had longstanding relationships with activists who lived outside of Techwood Homes (Lands, 2011).

While the network of activists involving Saito, Kadalie, and Jenga, among others, were invited in to help, other activists were not met with the same enthusiasm. Three weeks into the patrol, Techwood patrol members clashed with an unnamed communist organization when they arrived at the complex to distribute their organization’s newspaper (“Bat patrol, communists,” 1981). Kadalie recalls rebuffing members of left political organizations from throughout the region who travelled to Techwood and suggested to him that the patrol needed more explicit political leadership than what the Greens provided (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 1981). When the Guardian Angels, an unarmed patrol organization whose members had travelled from New York City to assist in efforts to protect the children, asked the patrollers how to support, they suggested the Angels have a press conference in support of the Techwood patrol, and then “go on back up to New York,” Kadalie recalls.

The Green's apartment served as headquarters for the patrol, as it was already the spatial location of political decision making at the project, where residents and nonresident activists congregated. Located in the center of the complex, their apartment served as both a physical and social center for many tenants (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). Kadalie explains that the patrol organizers who congregated at the Greens' house for meetings included primarily Black women tenant association members and a few outside activists and friends of the Greens, and sometimes people who had travelled from Alabama or elsewhere in the South to ask advice on how to self-organize defense (M. Kadalie, person communication, July 25, 2021). The Green's apartment therefore served as an actual and symbolic territorial barrier separating "insiders" from "outsiders." Those invited to participate in the patrol and political life of Techwood were invited into the Greens' living room. Those unwelcomed, such as the unnamed communist group or the Guardian Angels, were not invited into the living room nor welcome at the project. Saito, a non-Black non-resident, and Jenga, a non-resident, and others from throughout the South were welcome because they were "with the Greens," an inclusion realized through being invited into their home.

The organization of the patrol emerged from networks of trust earned through ongoing commitments to social and political activism. While city officials accused the patrol of being led by "outsiders" (see Ch. 3), the Techwood tenants involved in the patrol had their own understanding of "insiders" and "outsiders." Insiders were those who had gained trust and respect over years, regardless of whether they lived at the complex. Importantly, the presence of nonresident activists was not the determining factor; the leadership of the Greens and Black women tenant association members proved key to the internal support for and operation of the patrol.

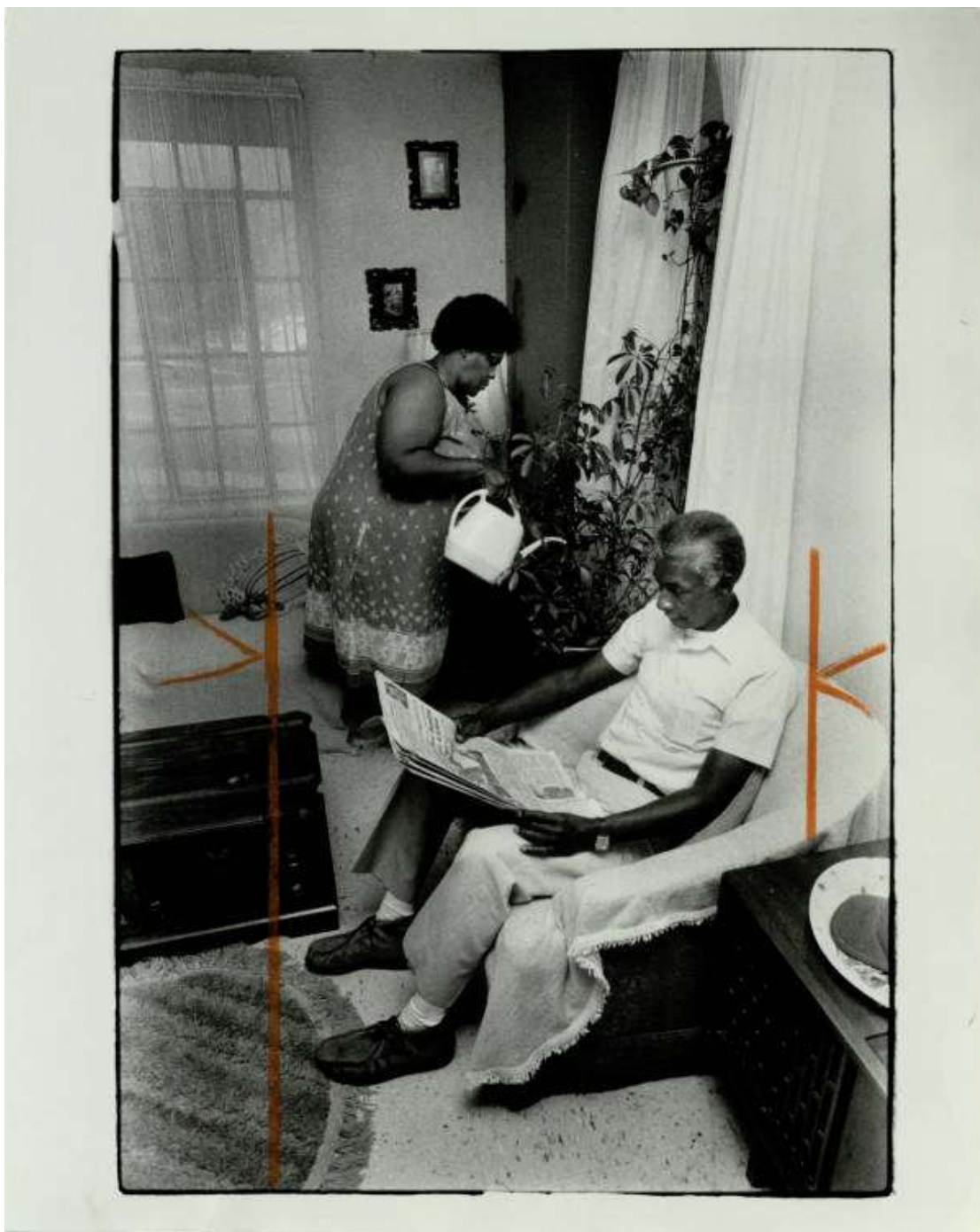


Figure 3 Marion and Israel Green's living room served as headquarters for the patrol.

(Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution via Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library)

2.5 “These people stepped forward”

The leadership of women activists, particularly those in the Techwood tenant association, as well as the positive vision reflected in the patrol have thus far gone underrecognized in historical accounts of the patrol. Rodriguez (2021), for instance, critiques the “gendered performative nature” of the patrol, arguing, “the Bat Patrol and its male leadership wanted to shift spatial production and community control from Black women to Black men” (154-155). In contrast to this narrative, both Saito and Kadalie stressed the role of Black women’s leadership in the decision-making and implementation of the patrol, the self-determination of tenants, and an ethics of collective care before and beyond the patrol.

The Greens joined the first Black families in Techwood Homes in 1968 and took up leadership in the tenant association not long after. Mr. Green served as president for six years prior to the formation of the patrol, and Mrs. Green served for several years prior to Mr. Green (Goolrick, 1981). Kadalie and Saito both pointed to the leadership of the Greens as key to the formation of the patrol as well as other political and social organizing happening inside Techwood. Kadalie recalls that the Greens were receiving pressure from the residents to take charge to protect the community, “but were eager to do it,” so “stepped forward” (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). The Greens, before and beyond the patrol, were outspoken critics of the city, the AHA, and business interests, and “said repeatedly that the tenants oppose any possible sale of the property.” (Goolrick, 1981). While Mr. Green held the office of president during the patrol, Saito recalls, “Mrs. Green was the power, right, and everybody knew that, and she pretty much led the way” (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

Mrs. Green explained to a reporter prior to the patrol formation that she felt the AHA had deliberately disinvested from Techwood Homes since it transitioned to majority Black and intentionally channeled “undesirable” tenants into the complex. She specifically called out the pressure from “powerful business interests and Central Atlanta Progress” (Goolrick, 1981). While Mrs. Green’s speech here problematically casts certain tenants as trouble-making others, she clearly placed the blame for disinvestment on the AHA. Her actions reflect this distrust of the AHA; it was Mrs. Green and other Black women tenants, with the help of outside activists, who had worked outside of the AHA to get the project on the National Register of Historic Places to save it from demolition.

Mrs. Green, credited as a patrol organizer, was not the only woman involved. A *Time Magazine* article reported, “Techwood's “bat patrol” consists of about 50 members ranging in age from 13 to 55, half of whom are women. Most of the patrollers have armed themselves with baseball bats, though some have carried guns” (McGrath & Boyce, 1981: 24). Kadalie recalls that Mrs. Green and “her people,” other Black women tenant association members, “were really the backbone to the whole thing” (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). Saito recalls that women of Techwood were “the heart,” the “primary decision makers,” “the ones who were on the ground. [...] pulling people together. [...] saying collectively what the priorities should be” (personal communication, July 25, 2021).

Despite agreeing that women were key leaders in the patrol, Saito and Kadalie disagree about the meaning of the decision for men to be “out front” representing the patrol. Kadalie refers to this choice as having “a male chauvinist element” in which women wanted to see men take active roles in protecting the children. Saito complicates this narrative by locating a non-Western orientation to gender roles:

But it was, you know, it was seen as an effort, obviously to protect the children in community and you know today, 40 years later, maybe the gender dynamics would have looked different, but to me it was not a masculinist activity at all. It was prompted by the leadership of the tenant associations collectively, which was overwhelmingly women. Even when, as in the case of the Greens in Techwood—Mr. Green was the President of that Techwood tenant association, but Mrs. Green was the power, right, and everybody knew that, and she pretty much led the way, so you know. In retrospect, I didn't know this at the time, but in retrospect, I've done a fair amount of research into indigenous cultures in North America, and it reminds me a lot of what I've seen depicted in many communities of the power dynamics there where women are the ones who are...It's seen in terms of responsibilities rather than rights for one thing, but also women are the ones responsible for the land, responsible for the wellbeing of the community in many respects. And they appoint the men that they will entrust to go out into the world to represent them: "Here, you go be our spokesman; here you do this." And part of that job is to defend the people, right? And that's very much the spirit of the gender dynamics that I remember from that period—that there were certainly men involved in the leadership of some of these organizations, but women were the heart, right? So yes, men we're seen as the primary ones who should be out there, like actually physically patrolling and defending the kids. It wasn't like anybody told women they couldn't do it, right? I'm pretty sure any women could have and there may have been some women—I don't remember, any, you know, patrolling, but I think that there probably were a few, but that it wasn't like an exclusionary thing. It was men saying we are stepping up and taking

responsibility for the wellbeing of our communities, I mean, it was the adults in general saying that. (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

Saito here is arguing that when the women “appointed” the men to carry arms and patrol the community, they were not abdicating power but exercising power differently, not through taking up arms but through making decisions to organize a defense. Women continued to take an active part in the patrol, even if unarmed. Beyond the leadership of women in decision-making and patrolling, elder women were also called on to assist by looking out for suspicious activity through their windows and reporting back to other patrollers (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021).

Kadalie agrees that the “women were calling the shots” and “wanted to let the men take credit for it” (personal communication, July 25, 2021). Yet, he also points to the perception of women with guns as a reason why women participants carried bats instead of guns:

[D]uring those days, you gotta understand, a woman carrying a M1 carbine you know in a public street would be very, very problematic. And the newspaper people go crazy with that kind of stuff. But a man carrying a pistol or carbine, a young man carrying a carbine, was not as sensational because of the gender stereotypes that were being perpetrated at the time. (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021)

Saito provides another practical explanation, suggesting that the decision to have men carry guns, and not women, was due to the desire to ensure that anyone carrying a gun had proper arms training, which, in 1981 at Techwood Homes, meant men who had been in the military or carried guns for personal protection (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

Saito specifically troubles negative representations of Black men’s armed self-defense, arguing that Black men of the patrol are cast in a paradox:

I find it really troubling that, you know, in the popular discourse and in the media, there's a lot of talk about black men not being there for their families. And then when they are there they're portrayed as thugs or criminals, or, you know, power hungry, whatever, instead of the recognition that they were, as for the most part, they always had tried to be, but this was one very clear instance in which they were coming together to say, "We are going to do this. We're going to protect our own children and you, the authorities, have proven yourself incapable and possibly unwilling to do this. And so, we're going to do it." And I think that this should be celebrated as a really important act or instance of the adults in general, but the men in particular, coming together to really do independently what needed to be done to protect their communities. (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

Here Saito laments that Black men are either seen as "not there for their family" or as "criminals" and "thugs," yet rebukes this paradoxical representation by grounding the patrol in a sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of the children:

When you've got children being kidnapped and murdered it shouldn't be their responsibility to take care of themselves or to protect themselves. It should be the adults in the community, and the men were stepping up and doing it.

She returns to a strong sense of responsibility, from both women and men of Techwood, to explain the formation of the patrol.

I disagree with Rodriguez's (2021) representation of the leadership and mobilization strategies as "asserting male dominance" (154). As I argue above, in contrast to the appearance of men's leadership, the patrol emerged from Black women's leadership and personal relationships between men, women, and child tenants and nonresident activists. While I depart

from Rodriguez on the gendered nature of the patrol, I agree with Rodriguez on the performative aspect of the patrol. In fact, I contend that it is the public nature of the patrol that presents the greatest threat to the state. This public performance of self-defense involved people, specifically Black public housing residents and their friends, taking up space as patrollers walked the sidewalks of the complex. It was only when self-defense became collectively organized and publicly displayed that the state moved to prevent residents from defending themselves; when people sat with shotguns in their windows or cars as discussed above, the police did not interfere.

The performative aspect of the patrol also took up symbolic space, threatening an imaginary of Atlanta that its elites had long intentionally projected onto the national stage (Ruthesier, 1996). As I discuss in Chapter 3, the patrol garnered substantial media attention, including from national news. The image of Black public housing residents patrolling with guns in the streets against a possibly racist killer and in defiance of the Black mayor and chief of police presented a serious challenge to the liberal spatial imaginary of Atlanta as the “Black Mecca” and a racially harmonious city of the “New South” (see Hobson, 2017 and Rutheiser, 1996). As I have argued elsewhere, Atlanta’s urban governance strategy involves mediation by Black elites to contain Black working-class rebellion (Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021). Media attention on armed Black public housing residents taking matters into their own hands seriously threatened the image of a passive Black working-class willing to work through the official channels of state power to secure concessions.

And the patrol was only one instance of residents acting outside of the official channels of state power. In contrast to perceptions of the patrol as spontaneous or led by a male minority of residents, Kadalie stressed that the patrol was an “outgrowth of these people’s self-organizing in their community,” and Saito stressed that that “it was very carefully planned out” (M. Kadalie,

personal communication, July 25, 2021; N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021).

Preceding the press conference announcing the patrol (discussed in the Chapter 3), residents of Techwood Homes organized resource provisions and community care, demonstrating a sense of collective responsibility for the children and for each other. Kadalie recalls:

And the way it worked is the kids didn't go nowhere without a mother or guardian. We stopped sending them to the store and all that kind of stuff. And at night—they were talking about a curfew—we had the kids get in at night. We had some problems with the older kids, but younger kids who they were snatching... You know? And there were people who were dependent upon their children to go to the store and get stuff for them. So that was kind of provided by the tenant association too. [...] They really knew and would say, “Look, so and so is going to the store.” And would call up somebody and say, “You need anything?” Then they would bring them stuff. The Greens were really remarkable people in so many ways. I can't even remember all the things they were doing. But I remember that they would send people to the store, for older people. [...] This so-called bat patrol was a part of the self-organization of these people in this project. And that they will organize mutual aid in other kinds of ways. (personal communication, July 25, 2021).

The actions to secure groceries for families reflect an ethic of mutual aid seen also in the shift from individual self-defense (shotguns in windows) to organized armed self-defense (the Ron Carter Patrol). The community imposition of a curfew reflects an ethic of collective care and self-determination. Instead of relying on the state to enforce a curfew, the residents themselves made sure the children were safe at night. For Kadalie, the state-imposed curfew was unnecessary; the residents were already coordinating to protect the children.

Importantly, this movement connected the various issues as it sought to create a positive atmosphere. Saito reports, “[The Ron Carter Patrol] wasn’t separable from all these other things that were happening, like supporting the maintenance workers and whatever else was happening in the community. It was the same group of people with the same general patterns of leadership that were addressing the issues that were affecting the community” (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021). Saito also recalls, “Everybody was working to try to maintain a really positive atmosphere in the community, to let people know that this was their home, it was a good place, the kids were safe, neighbors supported each other” (personal communication, August 13, 2021). Their efforts to maintain a positive atmosphere also involved disallowing harmful activities inside the neighborhood. Kadalie shared, “The tenant association identified a couple of people who were engaging in illicit drug trading on the corner of the streets, so they had to ask them to get the hell on out of there” (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021). Instead of deferring to the state’s authority by involving the police, the association asked those dealing drugs to leave the area.

They further expressed self-determination in defining the parameters for the patrol based on their own understandings of who was safe to carry weapons. Saito explains:

What I do remember is the agreement that the only people that would be armed would be specifically identified people, who mostly had been in the military, who had firearms training, and that nobody else would be armed. That was part of the idea here, was that we’re going to make sure that the only people that are armed are people who are responsible and know what to do with weapons and know not to use them. We don’t want random people with weapons patrolling. (N. Saito, personal communication, August 13, 2021)

Here, the patrol organizers defined for themselves legitimate weapons carriers, not based on the what the law deemed legitimate but based on who they deemed experienced and capable. Instead of allowing gun permits, a legal state document, to determine who would carry arms, experience determined for them who could be trusted to safely carry arms.

These examples of the tenants exercising self-determination—organizing to protect each other, before and beyond the patrol, outside of and without regard to the state—represented a threat to the authority of the state. In a space largely abandoned by the state, tenants self-organized to fill the gaps, securing resources and defending themselves from violence. Yet, the public performance of their self-determination threatened the dominant spatial imaginary of Atlanta. Images of Black public housing residents taking up space to defend themselves, outside of and in defiance of the state, presented a threat to the liberal spatial imaginary of Atlanta as the “Black Mecca.” While the patrol itself was not designed to contend with state power, I argue that it was the self-determination and projection of alternative socio-spatial imaginaries that caused a heavy response from the state and nonstate elites.

The actions and speech of tenants and patrol organizers stand in sharp contrast to the actions and speech of state and nonstate elite actors. In contrast to patrol organizers intentions of mutual aid, collective care, and creating a “positive atmosphere,” powerful people opposed to the patrol cast the patrollers as insurgent “vigilantes” spreading “communist propaganda.” In the next chapter I discuss the role of both state and nonstate elite actors in repressing and containing the Ron Carter Patrol. Through garnering pre-emptive consent for repression, utilizing legal and extralegal means to punish organizers, and “weeding opposition and seeding legitimacy,” Atlanta’s ruling elite, including nonstate influential elites, effectively contained the spread of armed patrols and re-established the state as the legitimate body of violence. Through their

actions, the ruling elite effectively marginalized these Black public housing residents, rendered them invisible, and denied them the right to self-defense.

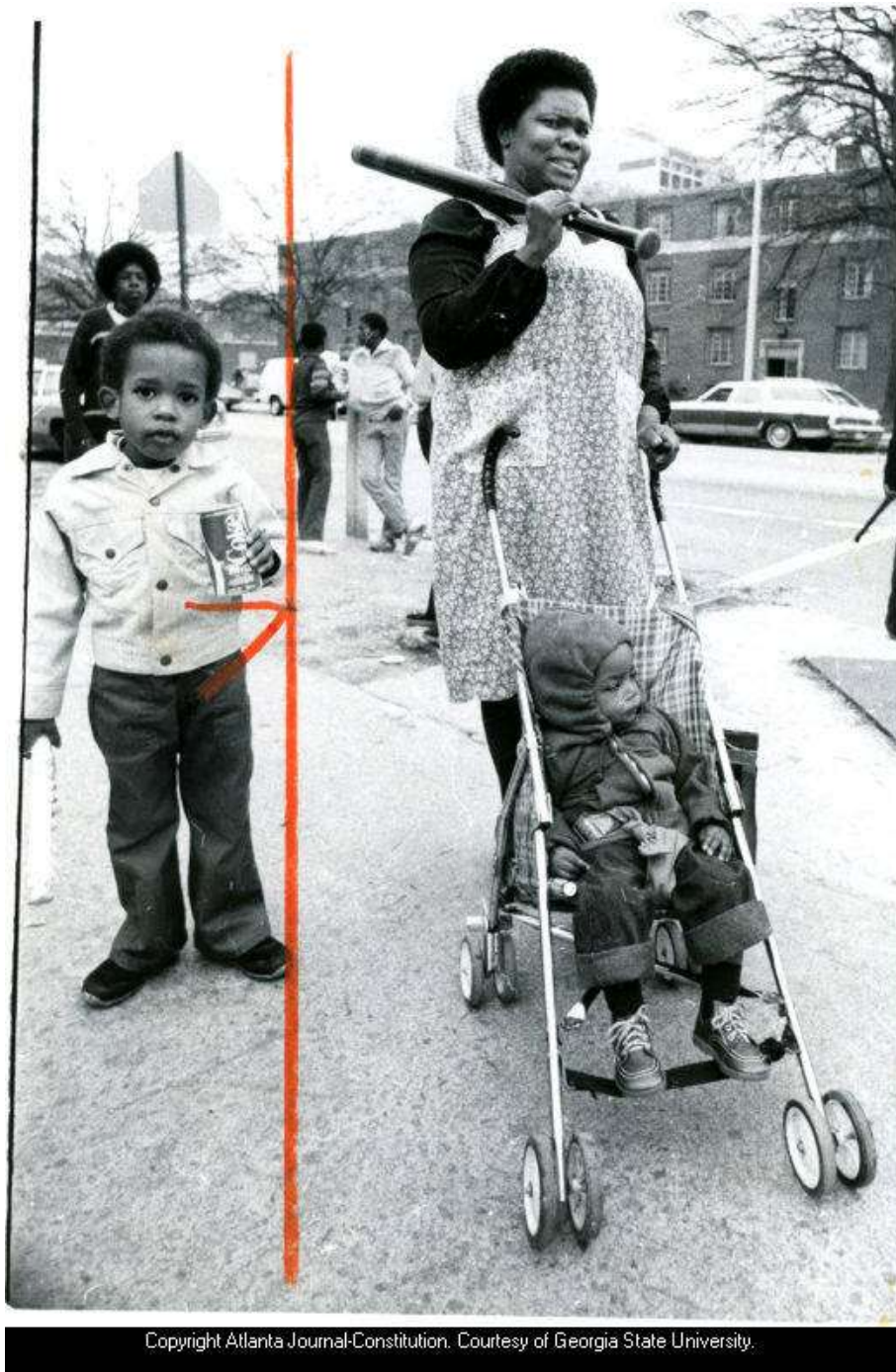


Figure 4 Women played active roles in the Ron Carter Patrol.

(Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution via Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library)

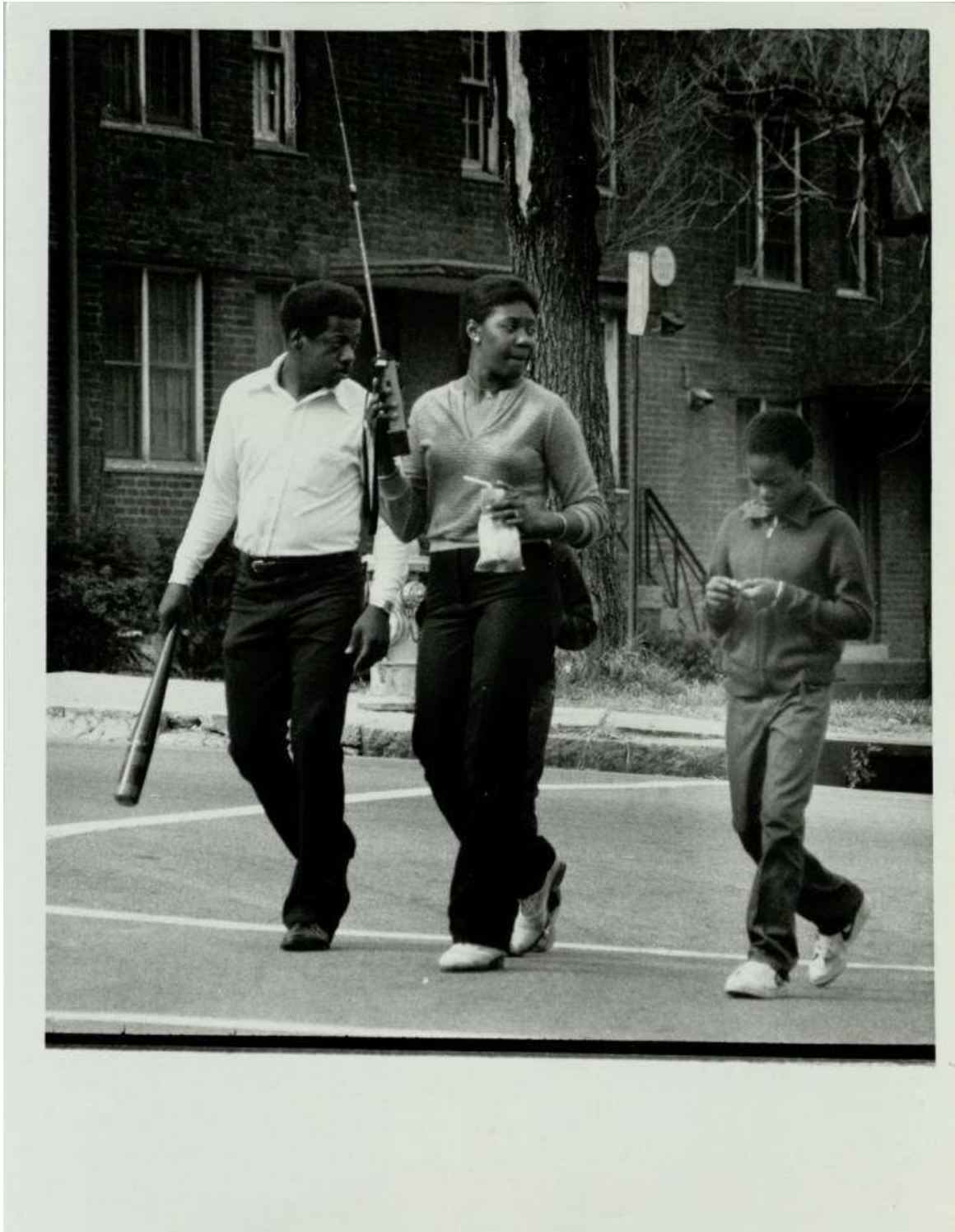


Figure 5 The patrol reflected an ethics of responsibility for the children of Techwood.

(Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution via Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library)

3 COUNTERINSURGENCY

The patrollers expressed an alternative ethics of self-determination and mutual aid during the neoliberal turn as the state was expanding its policing powers and tactics (see Camp, 2017; Camp & Greenburg, 2020; Gilmore, 2007; Wacquant, 2009; Williams, 2011). The patrol, seen as a threat to state authority, was swiftly repressed. Yet, contrary to conventional imaginaries of state repression being enacted by white governing elites on Black insurgents, in the “Black Mecca,” this repression was often led and carried out by Black elites and public officials. To understand the discursive and carceral responses to the patrol by both state and nonstate actors, I used newspaper accounts, original interviews, and secondary research. Before the Ron Carter patrol publicly began at Techwood Homes, city officials, Black non-governmental public authorities, and mainstream media attempted to prevent the patrol from happening. When patrol organizers went forward with their plans despite this resistance, these same players, some of whom were unlikely allies, publicly condemned the patrol and sanctioned unarmed alternative patrols. These counterinsurgency tactics deployed by both the state and unelected elites failed to stop the patrol at Techwood Homes yet likely helped to contain the spread and inter-project coordination of armed patrols between Techwood Homes and other public housing projects. In the months after the Ron Carter Patrol began, a prime suspect was arrested for the child murders, and public authorities urged people to go back to business as usual, despite the persistence of murders of Black residents.

The swift and far-reaching response by state and nonstate elites suggests that the Ron Carter Patrol threatened the authority of the newly Black-led city administration. The repression of Black self-defense in the housing projects served to maintain an image of the “city too busy to hate” for the benefit of capital accumulation and revealed “the impossibility of Black self-

defense” (Bledsoe, 2021). Interracial elite cooperation was key to the repression of the Ron Carter Patrol and the return to “normal” in the aftermath of Black agents asserting their right to self-defense.

3.1 Pre-emptive consent

On March 17th, 1981, organizers hosted a press conference in a meeting room at Techwood Homes to announce the formation of the Ron Carter Patrol. Chimurenga Jenga, Modibo Kadalie, and Israel Green sat behind a table covered with guns, bats, and radios. In attendance were police officials, the city attorney, and journalists, as well as Mrs. Green and other tenant association members, although their presence was not reported by the press. The patrol organizers hoped to clarify with the city attorney, in front of press, that they had the legal right to carry arms; according to Kadalie, the city attorney conceded that the patrol did not break any laws. To pre-empt any accusations of illegality, they made sure to clarify that children would carry bats and not guns. Their stated intentions were to patrol the Techwood neighborhood to look out for any suspicious people and defend against potential kidnappings, as organizers felt that the police were not adequately protecting the community against potential kidnappings (Kadalie, 2010; M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021).

The morning after the press conference, public condemnation and attempts to prevent the patrol began. *The Atlanta Constitution* ran a front-page article on the patrol, reporting, “[...] Mayor Maynard Jackson said police will not tolerate such “vigilantism,” and he asked Atlanta residents to “lower their voices” about the possibility that the 22 slaying and disappearances of the city’s children might be racially motivated” (Wells & Field, 1981: 1A). Saito recalls that Jackson reached out to Mr. Green and asked him to stop the patrol before it began “because it was bad for the image of the city.” From her perspective, “the city was saying in exactly so many

words, right, ‘your children don't matter. What matters is that Atlanta puts this face out to the world’” (personal communication, August 13, 2021). Mayor Jackson simultaneously delegitimized the patrol as vigilante action while seeking to dismiss claims of racial motivations for violence, claims which went against the image of a progressive city of the New South. Public Safety Commissioner Lee Brown stated that armed citizen patrols “will not be tolerated” (Field, 1981a: 1C). The day after the press conference, several police representatives including Deputy Police Chief Eldrin Bell visited the patrol organizers to try to convince them to disarm and coordinate with the police. After this meeting, Jenga reiterated to the *Constitution* that the patrol was legal and that patrol organizers were not trying to “be a police force but to protect our community” and would not disarm (Field, 1981a: 1C).

The city and the police began to discuss a plan to contain the armed patrol, announcing that “police and city attorneys are exploring the legal parameters of the community setting up armed patrols.” (McCraw, 1981: 2). Eldrin Bell, Deputy Police Chief and chief of the Atlanta’s Police Bureau’s field operations division, who had formerly patrolled Techwood, was in charge of coordinating police on the first day of the patrol. He reported that “the exact police strategy had not been decided on late Thursday,” but that the police planned to respond “low-key” at first, “with officers remaining in the background as much as possible” (Willis & Field, 1981: 28A). The police decided to abandon discussed legislative routes to outright ban armed patrol, as “[s]ome of the police officials said they feared that the process of getting such an ordinance passed would exacerbate the issue.” (Willis & Field, 1981: 28A). These statements to the press worked to pre-emptively gain consent for the repression that was to come, framing the police as reasonable and legitimate authorities while framing the patrollers as “vigilantes” and conspiracy-theorists embracing an unfounded explanation for the child murders.



Figure 6 A march protesting the arrest of patrollers.

(Courtesy of the Atlanta Journal-Constitution via Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library)

3.2 Repression and concessions

Despite these attempts to dissuade the organizers by pre-emptively condemning the patrol, the patrol officially began on Friday, March 20th with about fifteen participants (Willis & Rodrigue, 1981; Richardson, 1981a). In a press conference before the patrol began, the patrollers again displayed weapons—four pistols, an M-1 carbine, and thirteen bats painted red, black, and green—and the police advised reporters “that state law prohibits carrying firearms in a public meeting” (Willis & Rodrigue, 1981). As patrollers exited the press conference to begin the patrol, about forty police officers descended on the patrollers and arrested Chimurenga Jenga and Gene Ferguson on weapons charges. Later that night, the patrol continued with about forty

participants, none of whom openly displayed guns (Willis & Rodrigue, 1981). On the second day of the patrol, residents and activists surrounded a police car carrying Techwood resident Jerome Gibbs, arrested for carrying a gun, and placed their bodies underneath the car to prevent it from leaving. After the car eventually carried Gibbs off to jail, residents surrounded another police car by sitting in chairs, preventing the car from leaving the parking lot until police released Gibbs from custody (Richardson, 1981a).

After Gibbs arrest, Mrs. Green called out police for claiming the patrollers were “outsiders.” She stated, “They’ve been talking about outsiders. He’s a tenant. Now they’re coming to tenants” (Associated Press, 1981a). On the third day, after police pulled over and arrested Modibo Kadalie in connection with the confrontation the day before, a crowd began marching from Techwood Homes to police headquarters, then drove in cars and trucks to the headquarters and crowded into the lobby of the jail. They chanted “Free Modibo” and “The cops and the Klan work hand-in-hand” (Rodriguez, 2021; Brown & Mooney, 1981: 14A). The direct repression in the form of arrests, instead of quelling the patrols, spawned increased militancy in action and rhetoric. Jenga reflected a popular theory of Black Atlantans when he stated in a press conference after the jail action, “the police are snatching our children off the street and killing them” (Brown & Mooney, 1981: 14A).

The city combined arrests with negotiations in an attempt to end the armed component of the patrol. In a response to claims that the city and the police were neglecting Techwood, the police offered increased police protection and child-care programs. *The Atlanta Constitution* reported, “There was some hope among the police officials that the citizens might be persuaded not to use weapons and perhaps even to cancel their activities in return for stepped-up patrols by police and increased child-care programs by the Atlanta Housing Authority” (Willis & Field,

1981: 28A). The patrol organizers, however, did not acquiesce to these offers, and continued to patrol the community. Mr. Green stated to a reported, “The police tried to stop us. They tried to compromise. But we are determined to do it whatever the consequences. This is our community. If the police department had been doing its job, we wouldn’t have to do this” (Willis & Field, 1981: 28A). Indeed, it was only after the announcement of an armed patrol that police entered the public housing project in large numbers; yet, instead of turning their bodies to look out for threats to the community, the police turned inwards to the residents, viewing them as the threat.

The combination of repression and concessions to stop the patrol likely failed because the police were already highly distrusted by Atlanta’s public housing populations. The Capitol Homes Tenant Association had announced their decision to start an armed patrol. The news reported on the third day of the Techwood patrol that “[one] Atlanta policeman said residents of Bowen Homes, a predominantly black housing complex in northwest Atlanta, have begun stationing armed guards in cars parked along their streets. He told the story of one police officer who leaned into a car to ask a resident what he was doing and found him clutching a shotgun.” (Dart & Field, 1981:1A).

As Black public housing residents asserted their right to self-defense, the nation began to take notice. By March 23rd, after just three days of patrols, the Ron Carter Patrol had received national attention from *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and *The Boston Globe*, at least, with one particularly fear-inducing headline from *The Washington Post* suggesting the “city too busy to hate” may “be set to crack” (Robinson, 1981; Pienciack, 1981; UPI, 1981). These threats to the image of Atlanta were only heightened by the appearance that the patrols were spreading. Indeed, images of armed Black public housing residents patrolling the streets to defend themselves against gratuitous violence posed a challenge to idea that Black rebellion was

effectively contained through mediation by the Black elite. To contain the threat of Black self-defense, the city's authorities would need to generalize opposition to the patrollers and legitimize state power.

3.3 Weed opposition

The state, the media, and nonstate public authorities worked to marginalize the patrol by casting the patrol organizers as outside radicals who were causing harm to the Black community by impeding the investigation and even potentially causing another kidnapping. In the “Black Mecca,” opposition came not only from police and city authorities, but from a coalition of Black elites and from Black mothers—those who could be viewed as the most affected voices during the child murders.

Deputy Chief Bell recalled to reporters a conversation he had with Mr. Green. “We’re both on the same side,” Bell told Green. “I want to deal with you because I’m not so sure some of these outsiders don’t have other agendas they want to work on” (Richardson, 1981a: 15A). Another news report focused on Jenga and Kadalie, two non-residents arrested for patrol activities, painting them as outsiders and focusing on their participation in previous protests. A journalist quoted Jenga’s partner Saito who explained that she and Jenga adhered to some communist and socialist principles (Willis, 1981: 8A). The reference to “other agendas” and the reporting on “communist and socialist principles” serve to paint Jenga, Saito, and other non-resident activists as insidious actors whose interests lay beyond simply defending the community from violence. The focus on Kadalie and Jenga made it appear that they were the leaders, while marginalizing the leadership of residents such as Mr. and Mrs. Green and Jerome Gibbs, as well as the unnamed participants of the patrol and the protests in response to police repression. One journalist drew a line between tenants and non-residents, quoting just two residents condemning

the patrol while claiming those two residents “express the sentiments of a dozen other tenants interviewed this week” (Willis, 1981: 8A).

The patrol was also accused of impeding the investigation by diverting police resources away from the missing and murdered children case. Police Chief Napper³ suggested that the “outsiders” were intentionally interfering with the investigation:

This is a group of people who really don’t represent the sentiments of the Techwood Homes residents. We have an unfortunate situation here where a number of outsiders have forced themselves into the position of using Techwood Homes for their own selfish purposes. They are not only anti-police but are also against the missing and murdered kids investigation. I have to use men on the Techwood Homes disturbances that could better be utilized in various parts of the investigation. (Brown & Mooney, 1981: 14A)

In an article title “Bat Patrol Diverts Kid-Case Policeman,” journalists present the sixty police officers assigned to monitor the Techwood patrol as an impediment caused by the patrol itself instead of a repressive decision by APD (Willis & Epstein, 1981). This echoes Napper’s sentiment that his decision to divert sixty officers to Techwood Homes was necessary, as if the organized defense against the kidnappings was a bigger threat to public safety than the kidnappings themselves.

Chief Napper joined the chorus of police and city officials warning patrollers that they would be arrested if they broke any laws (Willis & Epstein, 1981). The continued warnings against arrests for illegal activity served to paint the patrollers as criminal, even though the city attorney had stated that carrying an unconcealed unloaded firearm was not illegal and the

³ Napper, named police chief in 1978, was the first Black police chief of Atlanta. As discussed in Chapter 2, Napper and other Black police officers and officials had some support from Techwood residents; nonetheless, patrollers militantly refused to cooperate with APD’s attempts to shut down the patrol.

weapons charges against some patrollers failed to hold up in court, such as when Kadalie's weapons charges were dismissed in an Atlanta municipal court (M. Kadalie, personal communication, July 25, 2021; Field, 1981b).

Beyond accusations of criminal behavior and interference with the ongoing investigation, the media suggested that the patrol was responsible for a kidnapping of a Techwood resident on the first day of the patrol. *The Atlanta Constitution* pointed blame at the patrol for Eddie "Bubba" Duncan's kidnapping, suggesting that the activity lured the attention-seeking killer to the project (Cooper, 1981). The same day, *The Atlanta Journal* ran an article quoting an unnamed police official who claimed the killer responded to a "challenge" posed by the public patrol (Post & Schwartz, 1981). A few days later, *The Atlanta Constitution* ran another article titled "Two theories why 21-year-old was slain;" both theories accepted the assumption that the killer was drawn to Techwood Homes because of the attention brought by the patrol (Schwartz & Fuller, 1981).

On the Tuesday following the first weekend of organized patrols at Techwood, a coalition of Black political and civic leaders met in Pascal's Motor Hotel. Calling themselves the Black Leadership Forum, attendees included Benjamin Hooks, executive director of the NAACP; Dr. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); activist Coretta Scott King; Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee founding member John Lewis; businessman John Cox; state Senator Julian Bond; state Representatives Hosea Williams, Tyrone Brooks, and Alveda King Beale; and representatives from the National Urban League and the Congressional Black Caucus (Maye, 1981a; Field & Allen, 1981; Rawls Jr., 1981). Despite prior strategic disagreements about the struggle against racism (Grady-Willis, 2006), Black Leadership Forum participants united over their opposition to the Ron Carter Patrol. The

coalition hosted a press conference in which they called for both the STOP Committee and the armed patrols to cease activities, accusing the organization of mothers of engaging in fraudulent fundraising and the patrollers of spreading “communist propaganda” (Clark, 1981: 6).⁴ Coalition members explained to a news reporter that their statement included “a plea for support for the police agencies handling the investigation and a reminder that there is no evidence yet indicating the race or motive of the killer or killers” (Field & Allen, 1981: 1A). Representative Brooks, speaking for the group, implied that the killer or killers could be Klan affiliated or members of “some black organization” (Field & Allen, 1981: 1A). The Forum encouraged prayer and non-violent activities. Dr. Lowery explained that the SCLC “believes that violence is a problem and can’t be a solution.” (Field & Allen, 1981: 8A). The Forum referred to the patrollers as communist vigilantes “who threaten to turn our community into an ‘armed camp’” (Clark, 1981: 1).

Black Leadership Forum⁵ members were explicit with journalists about their intentions: “According to some of the participants in drafting the statement, it is to be issued only by black leaders in an effort to emphasize local black leadership in trying to rally the support of the black community” (Field & Allen, 1981: 8A). When The Black Leadership Forum members presented themselves as “local black leadership,” they suggested that the Ron Carter Patrol members and the STOP Committee mothers were not “local black leadership.” Through positioning themselves as legitimate leaders, they delegitimized the patrollers self-defense project and discursively returned authority to state and nonstate political elites.

⁴ An ironic echo of accusations towards the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, of which both Lewis and Bonder were founding members (Grady-Willis, 2006)

⁵ Not to be confused with the Black Issues Community Forum, a grassroots activist group of which Kadalie was a participant.

Local newspaper reporters also platformed another group's opposition to the patrol: Black mothers and women residing in public housing. An *Associated Press* article quoted two mothers with the STOP Committee responding to Saturday's confrontation with police officers. Eunice Jones, mother of slain child 12-year-old Clifford Jones, warned that a parent or child could be hurt and added "That's what we're supposed to have police for." "We do not want a race riot" said STOP Committee member Zaimah Abur-Rahim in reference to the patrol (Associated Press, 1981b: para. 4). Two other articles quoted Cynthia Howell, "one mother": "They're just going to get somebody hurt. They're gonna get a child killed." (Brown & Mooney, 1981: 14A; Vigilantes Continue Marching, 1981: 6). Newspaper reporters also included quotes from "a mother at Techwood Homes" and Mary Sanford, Perry Homes Tenant Association President, both of whom condemned the patrol ("Vigilantes Continue Marching, 1981: 6; Willis & Field, 1981: 1A). Despite participants' insistence on women's leadership in organizing the Ron Carter Patrol, only the *Atlanta Daily World* names Mrs. Green as an organizer ("Vigilantes Continue Marching," 1981). The combination of quotations from Black women and mothers opposing the self-defense patrol and the exclusion of Black women in support of the patrol served to paint the actions of the patrollers as unwelcome masculinist activity.

Both organized opposition, such as from the Black Leadership Forum, and individual opposition, such as from some Black women public housing tenants, combined to delegitimize the patrol in public discourse. Yet, the state also sought to "seed legitimacy," to reestablish the state as the only acceptable wielder of violence and as the final arbiter on community defense.

3.4 Seed legitimacy

As the media, state, and Black elite worked to "weed opposition" by publicly marginalizing armed patrols, other patrol initiatives were given new attention. These alternatives—the Watch

Patrol and the Guardian Angels—were sanctioned by state and nonstate political actors as safe, nonviolent alternatives to armed self-defense patrols. The Watch Patrol, a volunteer group that was trained to keep watch and report suspicious activity to the police, enjoyed direct state support, while the Guardian Angels received discursive and material support from the Atlanta Citywide Advisory Council on Public Housing (ACPH). Organizers of these unarmed patrols joined popular media in directly contrasting these groups with the Ron Carter Patrol, a move which marginalized the Ron Carter Patrol, denied the tenants' right to self-defense, and reasserted the state's monopoly on armed defense.

On Tuesday, March 24th, the same day that the Black Leadership Forum met to write a public statement condemning “vigilantes,” City Councilman Arthur Langford held a public forum at West Hunter Street Baptist Church. Langford, as founding president of the United Youth Adult Conference (UYAC), an organization that had been assisting in weekly searches for missing and murdered children, announced that UYAC's Watch Patrol had been officially sanctioned by local authorities. Langford reported that two hundred “black and white” volunteers had been cleared by the police to participate in unarmed neighborhood foot patrols with mobile radios and walkie talkies. According to Langford, Public Safety Commissioner Brown and Police Chief Napper had ensured “complete police cooperation” with the Watch Patrol. UYAC had also reached an agreement with the Guardian Angels, an unarmed self-appointed subway and street patrol from New York City whose presence in Atlanta had previously spurred controversy (Maye, 1981a; Rawls Jr., 1981).

Both Langford and Guardian Angel spokesperson Lisa Evers condemned the Ron Carter Patrol. Langford warned against the use of weapons, stating, “We must be very careful with arming ourselves and the bats” (Maye, 1981a: 19A). Evers implied that the Ron Carter Patrol

was attempting to mimic police, claiming, “Our efforts have been fruitful because we came here to assist, not be policemen or investigators” (Maye, 1981a: 19A). Also present at the forum was Louis Whatley, chairman of the City-Wide Advisory Council on Public Housing (ACPH), who more directly chastised the patrol, saying, “We are not going to be foolish like those people over in Techwood” (Maye, 1981a: 19A). Each representative took a turn to contrast the missions of the Watch Patrol and the Guardian Angels with the Ron Carter Patrol; the former two were unarmed, cooperative with police, and sanctioned by the city, while the latter were armed, “foolish,” unsanctioned, illegitimate attempts to circumvent or contend with police power.

The ACPH, representing eighteen of the city’s twenty-five housing projects, had invited the Guardian Angels to form a chapter in Atlanta and offered food and housing to the group (Rawls Jr., 1981). The partnership between the ACPH and the Guardian Angels reflected a move within some tenant associations to distance themselves from the Ron Carter Patrol. Yet, there was not clear alignment within the tenants represented by the ACPH, as Bowen Homes residents, represented by the ACPH, were staging armed guards around their complex. Tenant associations in the United Tenant’s Council (UTC), an organization of tenant associations that had split off from the ACPH two years prior, also were not united in their support of armed patrols. While Techwood and Capitol Homes of the UTC set up armed patrols, Perry Homes tenant association president Mary Sanford condemned armed patrols. The Atlanta Housing Authority, the quasi-governmental body responsible for managing public housing and producing the project-wide *Tenants News*, omitted any mention of armed patrols in their monthly newsletter. In the face of active condemnation from the ACPH and split support from groups within the UTC, the Ron Carter Patrol found itself marginalized. At the same time, the Watch Patrol and the Guardian

Angels, with the support of the city and the ACPH, established themselves as sanctioned alternatives.

These two alternatives took similar spatial forms as the Ron Carter Patrol. All involved people, including Black public housing residents, taking up space by walking the streets. However, the Ron Carter Patrol differed sharply from these alternatives: participants were armed and openly critical of the state. As opposed to the Ron Carter Patrol which stressed the need for self-defense if (or when) the police did not respond to calls, the alternative patrols solely relied on the police for defense. Only patrols that maintained the state's monopoly on violence would be allowed. Through their cooperation with police, these alternatives wrestled authority back into the hands of the state, positioning police as the legitimate agents of community defense and denying Black agents the right to self-defense.

3.5 Business as usual

On April 20th, one month after the Ron Carter Patrol had officially launched, the Watch Patrol began with two hundred volunteers who had undergone three hours of training and background checks by the police (Post, 1981). The Ron Carter Patrol continued for weeks after the initial repression, yet largely outside of the public eye. Still, the specter of armed self-defense patrols continued to haunt news coverage of community responses to the missing and murdered children. *The Atlanta Journal* and *The New York Times* both contrasted the Watch Patrol with the Ron Carter Patrol, while *The Atlanta Constitution* editors called for “complete cooperation with police” and warned against a revival of the “bat patrol mentality” (Post, 1981: 18A; “Let police do the job,” 1981: 4A; Rawls, 1981: A16). Police Chief Napper and Public Safety Commissioner Lee P. Brown met with tenant association presidents and Napper urged tenants to set up unarmed patrols with the support of APD (*Tenants News*, May 1981). Even though the Ron Carter Patrol

continued, news coverage now placed the patrol in the past (warning against a “revival” instead of a “continuation,” for instance), rendering invisible the continuation of Black working-class and poor militant resistance to violence.

Meanwhile, the city administration, business elites, and UYAC focused on programming and improvements for public housing and other city residents. The Department of Parks and Recreation launched the “Safe Summer” program to serve over thirty thousand children in city-operated day camps and fourteen thousand in non-profit operated programs (Diggs, 1981). City council awarded ten thousand dollars to Langford’s UYAC for a “Summer Kick-off Festival” (Rodrigue & Wells, 1981). UYAC also hosted a “Project 1 Block Party” at Capitol Homes; organizers of the block party explained that, along with the Watch Patrol, it was intended to help alleviate fears of the kidnappings (Maye, 1981b). In May, the newly constructed Bowen Homes daycare center was completed with funding from Central Atlanta Progress, an organization of downtown business leaders (Mooney, 1981).

On June 21, 1981, Wayne Williams was arrested and indicted on two of the murders counted in the list of thirty in the missing and murdered children investigation. After Williams was arrested, more than twenty additional murders occurred in the city, including at least seven unsolved murders of Black women beginning in January of 1982. Due to controversies surrounding the trial and the continuation of murders many Black Atlanta residents distrusted the conclusion of the investigation, with some calling for ongoing investigations and others claiming the real serial killer or killers were still at large (Hobson, 2017). Contradictory actions and attempts by city officials to clean up Atlanta’s image despite the continuation of murders likely contributed to the widespread belief that justice had not been served. Despite the city’s claims

that the murderer had been captured, the city curfew for children that had been instituted in October of 1980 was extended repeatedly until September of 1982 (Berkely, 1982).

In late 1981 the battle over Techwood Homes continued. Led by a developer, a contractor, and a city councilmember, the 1980 proposal to sell the project and use the money to construct new housing was shelved by the close of that year after facing opposition from the AHA and the tenant association (McAlister, 1980). Meanwhile, the 17-million-dollar Comprehensive Modernization Program at Techwood-Clark Howell, which was initially set to begin bidding in November of 1980, had still not begun by June of 1981 (Richardson, 1980; “Background on Techwood-Clark Howell,” 1981). The tenant association again criticized the slow progress on the modernization project. In a press release signed by Mr. Green, the association accused Mayor Jackson of claiming to be “a champion of the poor” while neglecting public housing and demanded that renovations start within 120 days (“Techwood-Clark Howell Tenant’s Association press release,” 1981: 1). The AHA announced it would begin accepting bids for renovation in November or December of 1981, a full year after initially projected (Richardson, 1981b).

Despite the vehement opposition to selling Techwood, by the close of 1981 the debate to sell was revived when developer Joel Stokes and three tenant association presidents, including from Carver and Perry Homes of the UTC, joined forces to propose a tenant homeownership program in which tenants could buy back units. The project would be partially funded by the sale of Techwood-Clark Howell, which would free up valuable real estate worth millions (Richardson, 1981c; “Searching for a better way,” 1981). Proponents used Reagan-administration budget cuts to justify the plan and suggested the site could become new high-technology research facilities for the Georgia Institute of Technology (McAlister, 1981). Joel

Stokes called Mrs. Green to offer her homeownership in exchange for support for the proposal. She asserted spatial control by insisting that they meet in her home, where she invited him to repeat the proposal in front of other Techwood residents. Embarrassed, he refused, and she repeated the offer to those in the room and challenged that she would accept the deal only if everyone else in the room was also afforded a house.

Mrs. Green, accurately predicting the middle-class return to the city, warned, “The structure used to be for high-income people to move out of the city. Now the structure is for high-income people to move back into the city, and the property is valuable... We won’t be like the people who Model Cities moved out, where they never got to move back into their homes” (Hiatt, 1980). Sometime after Mrs. Green stood up to Joel Stokes, the Greens were evicted; they tried to contact Hosea Williams and local reporters, but received no response (J. Freeman, personal communication, January 6, 2022).

In the fall of 1981, the *Tenants News* reported that a special team of APD officers had been assigned to combat crime in public housing (*Tenants News*, September-November 1981). Close collaboration with the housing authority and police would eventually culminate in a sixty-day occupation of forty-two public housing developments in 1990 by APD per Mayor Maynard Jackson’s authority (Rodriguez, 2021: 172). In 1991, Techwood residents protested the AHA’s cooperation with APD after the housing manager supplied police with a master key to allow access to all units on “no knock” warrants or due to vacancy (Rodriguez, 2021: 173). As downtown redevelopment spurred by the 1996 Olympic games accelerated in Atlanta, “The police, the nonprofit complex, and universities became willing partners in this regime shift to evict deviant perspectives from newly revalorized land occupied by downtown public housing developments,” leading to the 1996 demolition of Techwood-Clark Howell Homes (Rodriguez,

2021: 173). Included in demolition planning was Coca Cola's Woodruff family and Georgia Tech president and alumni, who collaborated for "yet another instance of forced removal of poor blacks from the downtown area" (Keating, 2001: 145).

The Ron Carter Patrol occurred in just a few short weeks in the long and rocky history of public housing in Atlanta. Yet, the intense and multi-faceted repression of the patrol suggests an importance to this event that has thus far gone underexamined in Atlanta's history. At the beginning of the neoliberal turn, at the same time when attacks on public housing were proliferating, counterinsurgency tactics to contain Black life were spreading. As welfare turned to workfare and the prison industrial complex expanded, the invisible hand of the state was reaching into greater corners of domestic life, targeting those deemed insurgent. After the rebellions of the 1960s, Black urban inhabitants, either through simply existing or through organizing resistance, were seen as threats to state power and racial capitalism.

The repression of the Ron Carter Patrol, while it did not prevent the Techwood patrol from continuing, likely prevented the growth of public armed self-defense by other Black residents. State officials and public authorities collaborated to "weed opposition" to armed self-defense and "seed legitimacy" of the police and the city administration. In the "Black Mecca," counterinsurgency was enacted by Black state and nonstate actors who sought to maintain state authority. After a suspect was arrested for the child murders, public authorities encouraged residents to move on, despite the continuation of murders of Black residents. The denial of Black self-defense and marginalization of those enacting self-defense were necessary to continue the city's image as "the city too busy to hate," maintain the unstable governance coalition, contain the spread of rebellion, and reestablish the state as the legitimate authority on violence and self-defense.

4 CONCLUSION

Racial capitalism requires anti-Black racism as a condition for accumulation, and thus renders Black peoples as surplus within the division of labor and Black spaces as open for appropriation (Bledsoe, & Wright, 2019a; Chen, 2013; Pulido, 2016). The state plays a key role in upholding anti-Black racism through perpetuating spatial inequities, containing surplus populations, and enacting “organized abandonment” (Lipsitz, 1995; Gilmore, 2002; Roy, 2019). Under the exploitative thumb of racial capitalism, Black peoples continue to organize against violence and for liberation (Anderson & Samudzi, 2018; Bledsoe, 2017; Bledsoe & Wright, 2019b; Winston, 2020). In response to generalized Black rebellion in the 1960s, which threatened to topple the racial capitalist order inside the U.S. (Kelly, 2016), the state expanded its repressive functions. An ever-increasing web of carcerality cast entire populations as criminal as they were excluded from the process of production during the neoliberal turn (Wacquant, 2009; Wacquant, 2014). Further, the state developed counterinsurgency measures to put down rebellion more effectively (Camp, 2017; Kelly, 2016) and allowed the ascendancy of Black elites to formal political offices to mediate racial conflict (Reed, Jr., 1979).

In Atlanta, Black and white elites have created a vision of a “Black Mecca,” a “city too busy to hate,” and the model of the “New South.” These imaginaries rely on a class-blind narrative of racial harmony and send a message to potential investors that Black rebellion has been contained through cooperation of Black and white elites. This imaginary relies on cross-racial cooperation to repress, divide, and mediate working-class and poor Black and militant struggle, a condition for state-recognized Black political power. Just as the wealth of the ruling class is accumulated on the backs of the workers, the political position of Black elites comes on the backs of poor and working-class Black residents. The Black business and political classes

serve as mediators between the presumed homogenous body of all Blacks and the white power structure (Edgett & Abdelaziz, 2021).

Yet, the imaginary of Atlanta as an economically equitable post racial city continues to be challenged by Black agents asserting their right to self-determination and self-defense, outside of and in defiance of the state. The Ron Carter Patrol at Techwood Homes emerged from fear, distrust, and divisions spurred by the gratuitous violence of the Atlanta child murders and the ongoing economic exclusion of public housing residents. Under the leadership of Black women tenant association members, patrol organizers, both tenants and nonresident activists, “stepped forward” to collectively defend their bodies and their space from violence. The tenant association organizing, from fighting to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places to coordinating grocery pickups and a self-enforced curfew for children, reflected a prior orientation towards self-activity, outside of the authority of the state. The patrol was a spectacular moment within this tradition of self-determination, which enacted an alternative imaginary of collective responsibility, mutual aid, and autonomous decision-making. As opposed to the alternative patrols that relied on state power, the Ron Carter Patrol defied the authority of the state, insisting on their right to act on their own authority. The patrol, without intending to contend with the state, was insurgent due to the positioning of Black, especially working-class and poor, residents as always already criminal, always in an antagonistic relationship with the state. Participants recognized the racialized nature of the state’s response and insisted on their right to self-defense. As Jenga proclaimed, “When the Klan announced it was beginning military camps, there was no crusade or outrage. But everybody says it’s dangerous for us to have guns down here,” he said. “Well, we intend to make it as dangerous as possible to come in here and mess with our children.” (Dart & Field, 1981: 1A).

The public nature of the patrol—Black armed agents taking up space and the projection of images of the patrol through local and national media—threatened the dominant imaginary of Atlanta at a time when the biracial governance coalition was recomposing after instability during Maynard Jackson’s first mayoral term. In response, state and nonstate actors collaborated to contain the spread of armed patrols and shut down the Ron Carter Patrol through a web of counterinsurgency tactics. These measures relied on elite interracial cooperation within the “Black Mecca.” Through condemnations in the media and direct repression in the form of arrests, the patrol was quickly marginalized. Through the embrace of alternative unarmed state-sanctioned patrols, such as the Watch Patrol and Guardian Angels, the state reestablished its monopoly on violence.

As Bledsoe (2021: 13) aptly states it, “resisting the destabilizing effects of anti-Blackness is necessary to create a world not defined by anti-Blackness.” To resist anti-Blackness, scholars can help shed light on alternative imaginaries of resistance and analyze forms of repression. Understanding the role of mediation in the reconstitution of state power is key to breaking the cycle of reform and co-optation that marks decades of struggle against racial capitalism. Ron Carter Patrol organizers understood the connections between race, class, and the state and showed a fierce determination to assert their right to self-defense and autonomy. Modibo Kadalie summed up their position when he said, “But this city is remarkable. See the people always call for black unity; that’s a myth. You know, that really is a myth, the Black united front strategy. That’s bullshit; ain’t no Black united front, that’s the petty bourgeoisie trying to rally people to their cause, you know?” (personal communication, July 25, 2021). As critical human geographers continue scholarship on Black geographies, a matched attention to the complex relationship between class, race, and the state will continue to be key to understanding how

people can, and indeed already are, resisting the horrors of racial capitalism and fighting for a new world not defined by anti-Blackness.

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