

The

Kercheval Incident

Detroit 1966



See. Think. Wonder...



Detroit - August 1966

Share out...

- What do you see?
- What do you think is happening?
- What questions do you have?

The Kercheval Incident

In August 1966, officers from the Detroit Police Department (DPD) arrested three young Black men for “loitering” outside the Kercheval Ave Headquarters of the Afro-American Youth Movement (AAYM), a Black Power organization that led Detroit’s anti-police brutality activism.

This arrest was the latest in an illegal DPD campaign of harassment, and surveillance of AAYM.

These arrests sparked four days of unrest and conflict between DPD and the Black residents of the East Side neighborhood.

The DPD, the city government, and the Wayne County prosecutor blamed this event on the AAYM and labeled it a success of policing.

Historical Thinking

Historical thinking is when you use critical thinking skills to analyze and understand information from the past.

- **Sourcing** - Considering the origins of the primary source.
- **Contextualization** - Making connections between historical events and circumstances and accounts.
- **Corroboration** - Comparing documents to each other and finding similarities and differences between accounts.
- **Close Reading** - Understanding an author's claims about an event and evaluating evidence and word choice the author uses to support it.

In this investigation you will explore...



HOW WERE POLICE USING THEIR POWER IN RESPONSE TO BLACK RESISTANCE?



HOW DID BLACK RESISTANCE AND POLICE ACTION IN DETROIT FIT INTO NATIONAL PATTERNS?



DO THESE EVENTS DEMONSTRATE EQUAL PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW (THE 14TH AMENDMENT)?



The 14th Amendment

The 14th Amendment says...

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside.

No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

This means...

All people who are citizens of the United States have equal protection and rights under the law.

No part of the government can take away a person's life, freedom or property without a fair legal process. No authority should deny anyone equal protection under law.

States need a justifiable reason (held to a high standard) for arresting, jailing, or using force against someone and that reason should not be discriminatory based on things like race or gender.

Keep this in mind -

- Do the actions of the Detroit Police Department and national law enforcement in towards members of Detroit's Black community reflect equal protection under the law? Why or why not?

The National Context



BLACK POWER

Black resistance building up to the time of the Kercheval Incident sometimes took the form of Black Power organizations...

Keep these in mind -

- What (events or feelings) set the stage for the rise of Black Power?
- What does Black Power mean to you?
- How did Black Power differ from existing Civil Rights movements?

BLACK POWER IN 2 MINUTES OR SO

https://youtu.be/OE6oS_3HSIM



Now answer these questions:

- What (events or feelings) set the stage for the rise of Black Power?
- What does Black Power mean to you?
- How did Black Power differ from existing Civil Rights movements?

BLACK POWER

Now turn to your handout...

Share out...

- What are the different perspectives on Black Power highlighted in these two sources?
- How are they similar or different?

COINTELPRO

Counter Intelligence Program

The Civil Rights Movement and the rise of Black Power were met with incredible resistance by many people in power, including those with government agencies at their disposal.

Keep these in mind -

- What was COINTELPRO?
- Why might the FBI want to spy on these people and these groups?
- Who are some of the targets of COINTELPRO?
- What does it mean to “neutralize” these groups and leaders?

COINTELPRO

https://www.tiktok.com/@theoriginalsilverfoxx/video/7040664603130645806?is_from_webapp=1&sender_device=pc&web_id=7189442406255773227



J. Edgar Hoover's Purpose

The purpose of this new counterintelligence endeavor is to expose, disrupt, misdirect, discredit, or otherwise neutralize the activities of black nationalist, hate-type organizations and groupings, their leadership, spokesmen, membership, and supporters ...

Efforts of various groups to consolidate their forces or to recruit new or youthful adherents must be frustrated. No opportunity should be missed to exploit through counterintelligence techniques the organizational and personal conflicts of the leaderships of the groups and where possible an effort should be made to capitalize upon existing conflicts between competing black nationalist organizations. Be alert to determine ... personal misconduct on the part of militant nationalist leaders so any practical or warranted counter-intelligence may be instituted. – J Edgar Hoover

Goals of COINTELPRO

- 1. Prevent the coalition of militant black nationalist groups.*
- 2. Prevent the rise of a “Messiah” who could unify, and electrify, the militant black nationalist movement.*
- 3. Prevent violence on the part of black nationalist groups.*
- 4. Prevent militant black nationalist groups and leaders from gaining respectability, by discrediting them to three separate segments of the community - the Negro community, the white community, and Negro radicals.*
- 5. Prevent the long-range growth of militant black organizations, especially among youth.*

Targets of COINTELPRO

COINTELPRO targeted groups and individuals that the FBI deemed were trying to undermine the power or authority of the U.S. government and law enforcement. This included nonprofit organizations, student groups, Black Student Unions, churches, Feminist and Anti-War groups, the Ku Klux Klan, Civil Rights and Black Power groups, and leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, and Malcolm X.

One way that law enforcement agencies enacted COINTELPRO was through the use of agent provocateurs. An agent provocateur is a person who is employed by law enforcement entities to encourage people in certain targeted groups to break the law so that law enforcement agencies have cause to arrest them.

Now answer these questions...

- What was COINTELPRO?
- Why might the FBI want to spy on these people and these groups?
- Who are some of the targets of COINTELPRO?
- What does it mean to “neutralize” these groups and leaders?

Share out...

- Do you think COINTELPRO was justified?
- Was it necessary?
- Was it good/just?

Leading Up to the Kercheval Incident



The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed - a group of majority Black college students who used nonviolence and direct action like sit-ins, boycotts, and protests against racial discrimination. This national organization purposefully remained independent of other Civil Rights organizations and took up issues like desegregating buses and voting rights. In the mid-60s, the group transitioned from nonviolence and took up the Black Power movement.

White and Black civil rights activists in Detroit started a chapter of the Northern Student Movement (NSM), a coalition affiliated with the (SNCC). Black activists involved with the Detroit NSM Chapter soon started an offshoot organization, the Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME), in order to help organize poor Black communities facing discrimination in employment, school, and law enforcement.



1960



1962



The Detroit Police Department (DPD) began harassing and arresting ACME members almost immediately after its formation, even before the group decided to make police brutality its top priority for community activism.

The police department successfully lobbied for the anti-loitering law which the DPD often used to criminalize and arrest ACME members for their political activities.

1962-
1963

1964

Detroit's Anti-Loitering Law

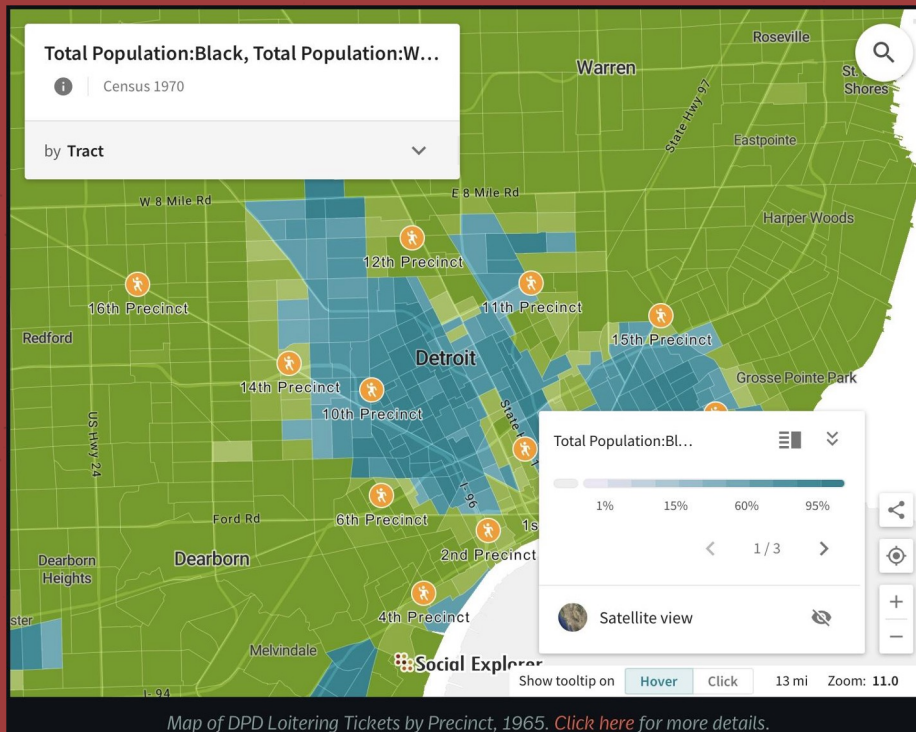
"It shall be unlawful for any person to loiter on any street, sidewalk, overpass or public place . . . so as to hinder or impede or tend to hinder or impede the passage of pedestrians or vehicles." City of Detroit Ordinance Section 58-1-10

The DPD often used the city's vague anti-loitering law to target and arrest ACME members for their political activities. In 1964, the police department successfully lobbied for the anti-loitering law in order to legalize its longstanding practice of making unconstitutional "investigative arrests." Detroit's Mayor enacted an "anti-loitering" law to give police the ability to arrest anyone in public for any reason at any time. They were tools of "discretionary policing," or laws whose enforcement was based on individual officers' judgment. Although the police did issue tickets to some people engaging in criminal activity, many argued that the anti-loitering law allowed prejudiced officers to abuse their authority.

Share out...

- What are your reactions to this law and how it was used?
- Do you see an unequal application of the law in today's world?

Map of Racially Targeted Enforcement of Anti-Loitering Law



Use the link to access the map.

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d626e10a71f44968ad7ce4ca0bd85ed8#ref-n-DilfRy>

Scroll over the yellow icons and geographic areas to explore the map.

Share out...

- What are some patterns you notice about where the DPD chose to enforce the anti-loitering laws?
- What does this suggest about DPD's enforcement of the law? How does it connect to the idea of equal protection under the law?

The Adult Community Movement for Equality (ACME) launched an anti-police brutality direct-action campaign that led to an escalating series of confrontations with the Detroit Police Department.

As part of the rise of Black Power, ACME split into two organizations, paralleling what happened nationally with SNCC. The Black leaders of ACME took charge of an offshoot organization that remained in its Kercheval headquarters: the Afro-American Youth Movement (AAYM).



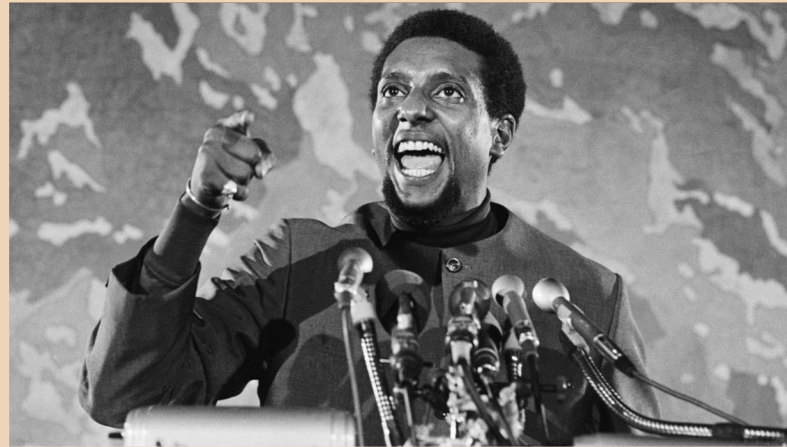
1965



1966



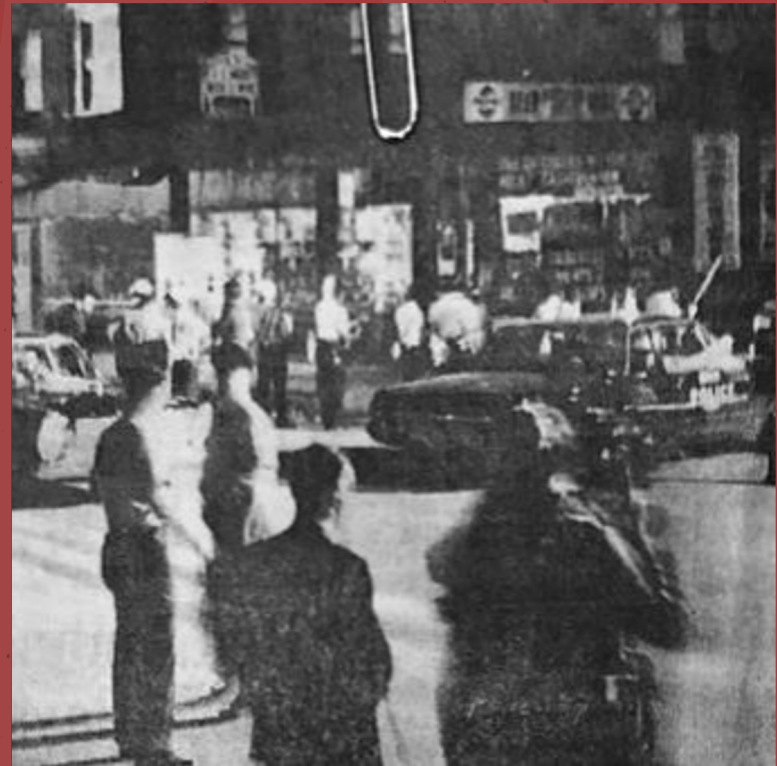
The new SNCC leader, Stokely Carmichael, issued his famous call for Black Power during a march in Mississippi.



1966

The Kercheval Incident

August 9, 1966 - August 12, 1966



At 8:25 pm, a police cruiser approached seven Black males standing on the sidewalk outside the ACME-AAYM headquarters near the intersection of Kercheval and Pennsylvania. The white officers ordered them to “move on”. Four complied, but three allegedly refused.

The officers began to ticket them for loitering and asked for their identification. Again, all three refused to comply. The officers called for backup, and within minutes, two Tactical Mobile Unit (TMU) squad cars, designated for “riot control”, arrived at the scene. By then, a crowd of around 50 Black residents had gathered.

As the officers tried to put one man in a cruiser, a scuffle broke out... The twelve officers on the scene subdued the three men and charged them with inciting a riot and resisting arrest.



Tuesday

The crowd grew to include more than 100 residents. As the police “manhandled” the three Black men, some in the crowd began shouting insults at officers and throwing rocks and bottles. Rumors then circulated around the neighborhood that the police had killed a man and broken another man’s arms. 150 police officers swept the area in riot gear, armed with canisters of tear gas and bayonets mounted on their rifles.

TMU cruisers in units of six patrolled the Kercheval-Pennsylvania area, and the Mounted Division, officers on horseback trained in crowd control, waited in reserve on Belle Isle in case violence spread elsewhere in the city.

Thirteen people were injured, including four police officers, and six more people were arrested.



Tuesday



How did the Kercheval Incident begin?

Let's take a look at two different accounts of how the Kercheval
Incident began...

Source A

Transcript from a 1968 congressional hearing on "Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders," conducted by the right-wing Senate Subcommittee on Investigations in March 1968. The hearing, held in Detroit eight months after the 1967 Uprising, sought to prove that a conspiracy of Black radicals had caused that violent event and also pursued a theory that the same radicals had incited the Kercheval "Mini-Riot." The Senate subcommittee called Detective Lt. William McCoy, who was in charge of the Demonstration Detail of the DPD's Special Investigation Bureau, its main political surveillance unit.

Keep in mind....

1. What claims does this account make?
1. How does the document's language show us the speaker's perspective?

Lieutenant McCoy. The Kercheval incident started at 8:25 p.m. on August 9, 1966, when the fifth precinct cruiser—a four-man patrol car—observed seven men grouped in front of 9626 Kercheval. These seven men were impeding pedestrian traffic. The cruiser was in the vicinity in response to previous complaints of loitering.

The CHAIRMAN. In other words, these men had been obstructing traffic?

Lieutenant McCoy. Pedestrian traffic; yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. And there had been a complaint and the cruiser went there in response to the complaint?

Lieutenant McCoy. Yes, Mr. Chairman; that is correct.

The officers informed the seven men that they were blocking the sidewalk and instructed them to move on. Four of the men complied with the police officers' command. The three remaining refused to move. The officers again told the three to move on. The officers then asked the three for identification in preparation of writing loitering ordinance violations. The three began to yell, "This is our neighborhood and we won't be moved. Whitey is going to kill us."

A crowd began to gather, and the fifth precinct cruiser asked for assistance over the police radio.

The CHAIRMAN. As I understand, they started yelling "Whitey is going to kill us" when they hadn't been asked anything but to move on and stop obstructing pedestrian traffic.

Lieutenant McCoy. That is correct.

Turn and talk...

- What claims does this account make?
- How does the document's language show us the speaker's perspective?
- Remember...
 - A Claim is a statement about what is true or good, what should be done or believed
 - An Account is a record or narrative description of the past

Source B

On August 18, 1966, a new coalition called Citizens for Fair Law Enforcement published "Who Started the Kercheval Street 'Riot'" as a paid advertisement in the Detroit Free Press. People Against Racism, the white radical group started by former ACME member Frank Joyce, created this account based on the statements provided by ACME-AAYM members who were arrested and their experiences with the multi-year police harassment campaign.

Keep in mind....

1. What claims does this account make?
1. How does the document's language show us the speaker's perspective?

THE INITIAL INCIDENT

On Tuesday, August 9, between 8 and 9:30 p.m., Wilbert McClendon, Clarence Reed, and James Roberts were standing at the curb leaning against a car parked on Kercheval near Pennsylvania. A passing police cruiser stopped and one of the four officers said to the three men, "Move on Buddy, or you're going to get a ticket." McClendon said, "For what." The police jumped out of their car and one said, "O.K., let's see your identification." Roberts said, "I don't have any identification." (He had just come from home and did not have his wallet) One officer then said to another, "O.K., call some help."

Within three minutes, 15-25 police cars converged on the area. Clarence Reed, who protested the manhandling of Roberts, was severely beaten by more than six police officers in full view of a gathering crowd. He was unable to move and was taken directly to Receiving Hospital where he was not allowed to make a telephone call to his family. The other two men were taken to the Fifth Precinct station. When they entered the precinct parking lot they noticed an unusual number of police cars and officers, many armed with "riot equipment."

In the neighborhood itself, people naturally entered the streets to see why there were so many police in the area. Some young people threw rocks and yelled insults at the police.

Turn and talk...

- What claims does this account make?
- How does the document's language show us the speaker's perspective?
- Remember...
 - A Claim is a statement about what is true or good, what should be done or believed
 - An Account is a record or narrative description of the past

After looking at both sources...

- These documents agree that...
- They disagree about...
- Which document do you think is most reliable? Why?
- How do you think the Kercheval incident began?
Based on your reading of these two accounts?

Early Wednesday morning, acting on a tip from an FBI/DPD **informant inside ACME-AAYM**, police officers stopped three cars leaving the group's headquarters and discovered hunting knives, rifles, bricks, and ammunition.

DPD riot police circulated throughout the Kercheval/Pennsylvania area in militarized "saturation patrols" into the evening and arrested around 50 more people, but major violence did not break out.



Wednesday

Black community leaders took action to end the disturbance. Ministers, block club representatives, and other civic leaders created a plan to control rumors and began patrolling to calm the situation. They urged the media not to inflame tensions with sensationalized reports and defined their roles should future incidents occur.

The police arrested only fifteen people on Day 3 but maintained a massive armed presence on the streets.



Thursday

Black community leaders continued their “peace patrols”, dispelling rumors and urging residents to stay indoors. The police arrested six young Black males for minor offenses and also arrested six white males for intervening in the situation, looking to stir up racial unrest.

Alvin Harrison, the head of AAYM, called a press conference at the group’s headquarters and accused the police department of instigating the Kercheval incident. He labeled the incidents that the police and media called a riot to instead be a “rebellion by the Black community against an oppressive situation”.



Friday

Who was **ALVIN HARRISON?**

We are going to take a close look at one of the leaders of ACME and AAYM during the Kercheval Incident...



Who was **ALVIN HARRISON?**

Alvin Harrison was the young new leader of the Afro-American Youth Movement. Harrison, born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1940, moved to Detroit from New York City in May 1965, and quickly became an ACME and AAYM leader in the campaign against police brutality.



Primary Source:

This excerpt is from a Detroit Police Department document, "Information on Meeting Held at Central Methodist Church" on August 20, 1966 - about a week after the Kercheval Incident. It details Alvin Harrison's speech at a mass meeting held by Citizens for Fair Law Enforcement in response to the recent police violence, witnessed by a DPD informant. Alvin Harrison, the AAYM director, is speaking here.

Keep in mind....

1. What is Harrison's perspective on the role of violence in policing?
1. What does he believe the Black community's response to this police action should be?
1. What is his message to the audience?

Share out...

- What are your reactions to Alvin Harrison's message?
- How might you feel hearing this message from a leader as a member of such an organization?

It is clear that the DPD and FBI had at least one agent/informant embedded within ACME-AAYM. Consider the following evidence on your handout that Alvin Harrison was one of the agent provocateurs in ACME-AAYM.

Now Consider...

- How might the circumstances under which AH was involved with these organizations affect your understanding of his message?
- Based on the background information, I understand this document differently because...
- Despite his motives, do you still believe what Harrison said was true?
- How is COINTELPRO reflected in what the DPD did here?

In this investigation you explored...



HOW DID POLICE USE THEIR POWER IN RESPONSE TO BLACK RESISTANCE?



HOW DID BLACK RESISTANCE AND POLICE ACTION IN DETROIT FIT INTO NATIONAL PATTERNS?



DID THESE EVENTS DEMONSTRATE EQUAL PROTECTION UNDER THE LAW (THE 14TH AMENDMENT)?



To reflect what you have learned...

You will create a ZINE - a creative representation of what you have learned about the Kercheval Incident and what Police misconduct, Black Resistance, and “equal protection under the law” look like today. You will use two sheets of paper, folded in half, to create an 8 page zine.

Your ZINE will answer the unit’s guiding questions. On your final project handout you will find:

- Driving questions
- Considerations
- Success Criteria
- Example prompts to explore
- Instructions: What is a Zine?
- Rubric
- Inspiration/Jumping off points

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The Kercheval Incident StoryMap is derived from Detroit Under Fire: Police Violence, Crime Politics, and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Civil Rights Era, a public history exhibit created by the Policing and Social Justice HistoryLab, an initiative of the University of Michigan Department of History and a component of the U-M Carceral State Project's Documenting Criminalization, Confinement, and Resistance initiative.