Part I: Introduction to Rebellions of the Past and Present

Emily Sánchez: From the Newark Public Library, this is *Demanding Justice in New Jersey*.

[Introduction music - "Got To Have Freedom" by the Spirit of Life Ensemble]

This podcast is about local histories of community organizing in the state. I'm your host, Emily Sánchez.

As I mentioned last time, for the next couple of episodes, we are going to move to another point in Jersey City's history. We're specifically going to zoom into the rebellions of 1964 and 1970.

The last time I saw rebellions on a large scale throughout the United States was in 2020 after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. For listeners who might not remember this, thousands of people across the world took to the streets to protest police brutality during this summer. Those who could not physically participate in the demonstrations due to COVID contributed as much as they could online through social media campaigns or mutual aid for folks on the ground.

On the streets, protesters not only demanded an end to police violence but also challenged the place of police within society today, asked what's their purpose, and recognized their role throughout history in the surveillance and enacting of violence on working-class communities of color. Although the 2020 rebellions were protests rooted in longer histories of organizing against police violence, many of you have probably heard people, including reporters, frame rebellions as spontaneous "riots," events that are "chaotic" or even as "nights of rage."[1]

Historically, the term "riot" and adjacent terms connoting chaos and destruction have been used to describe events where people of color have protested violence enacted on them. The word "riot" literally means a "violent disturbance of the peace by a crowd."[2] In the context of 2020, using the word to describe rebellions ultimately criminalizes the events and dismisses them as actions of protest. Recognizing this history and the use of the word to undermine the actions of

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[1] Examples of reporters framing the 2020 rebellions as violent can be found here: ABC News, "Protests turn violent across the nation," *Youtube* video, 4:43 minutes, May 30, 2020, https://youtu.be/tcOPrL3XsCI; CBS News: The National, "George Floyd's death sparks days of protests, rioting Minneapolis," *Youtube* video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uDIg2fN2T4; CBS Boston, "Boston Businesses Damaged, Looted During Riots," *Youtube* video, 1:25 minutes, https://youtu.be/7Uxjy71_OAo; NBC News, "Escalating Protests Nationwide Over the Death of George Floyd | NBC Nightly News," *Youtube* video, 3:38 minutes, https://youtu.be/q2L-8-rUM7s.

[2] Oxford English Dictionary, March 2023, "Riot."

protesters, this podcast will use the word rebellion instead and acknowledges the mass protests as, in the words of historian Elizabeth Hinton "acts of insurgency against a repressive society."[3]

[Transition music - "Eco Technology" by Lexin_Music]

Now, I can already guess a couple [of] questions some of you might have right now: Why not just talk about the 2020 Rebellions of today? Why do we have to go back and study the rebellions of the 1960s and 70s? Those are really good questions and don't get me wrong, the 2020 rebellions are really important, especially to the longer history of organizing against state violence within communities of color in the United States. In order to more fully understand the events leading up to the 2020 rebellions, including how state and police violence have gone on for so long, we have to go back to the [19]60s and 70s. We have to analyze what type of organizing was going on at that time related to the issue of police violence and examine the type of policies passed at the federal level around the issue of police and poverty in working-class communities of color. We have to really ask ourselves: were these policies actually helpful, and did they bring about any change?

We will begin to answer these questions and gain more insight into the 2020 Rebellions by examining the Jersey City rebellions of 1964 and 1970. Today, we will focus on the first one.

To give you a sense of what comes next:
In the first part of the podcast, to understand the historical roots of the 2020 rebellions and the rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s, we will first try to explore the following question: How did organizing against racial inequality look like in the North up until 1964?

In the second part, we will zoom out a bit and examine federal policy. We'll specifically try to answer: what were the types of policies passed at the federal level, before 1964, that targeted poor, working-class urban communities of color?

For the third and final part of today's episode, we'll zoom into Jersey City and learn more about the 1964 Rebellion by hearing from some Jersey City residents and friends of theirs.

While you're listening, think about how this history helps you understand the rebellions of the present moment?

With that, let's get this show started …

[Transition music - "Catch It" by Coma-Media]

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[3] Elizabeth Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion Since the 1960s*, First Edition (New York, NY: Liveright, 2021), inside jacket.

Part II: Activism in the North

Although many traditional history textbooks do not discuss civil rights activism in the North before the late 1960s, historians have revealed that working-class people of color in the United States had been challenging racial inequalities in the North for decades by 1960. In 1941, for example, thousands of Black workers in Detroit, Michigan held demonstrations to call out the discriminatory hiring practices of the city's auto and defense industries, ultimately demanding fair job opportunities for Black men and women. In 1958, a group of mothers in Harlem in New York City (NYC), and their children boycotted the schools due to segregation and unequal conditions. In 1959, over 400 Black residents protested police brutality in Jersey City.[4] Four years later, in Boston, Massachusetts, hundreds of parents rallied to protest racial discrimination in Boston's public schools. That same year, in 1963, thousands took to the streets in Detroit to protest racial discrimination in housing, education, employment, and ongoing police violence.[5] In the early 1960s, priests and mothers of the downtown area of Jersey City, many of whom were Puerto Rican, called for better housing available to poor, working-class people in the city.[6] Together, these local protests in the North, along with local movements in the South, called for a transformation of society that addressed ongoing racial inequalities and poverty.

[Transition music - "Inspiring Cinematic Ambient" by Lexin_Music]

Throughout this time, as indicated by the 1959 protest, police brutality was a constant problem for youth of color living in Jersey City's working-class neighborhoods:

Nidia López: "There was a lot of police abuse during that time. You know … yeah … there was a lot of police abuse, even harassment. I mean, I remember going to events that Father Egan used to have a little dance or something. And then I would have to walk home with maybe a friend. And if a policeman would find, would see us in the street, they would say things to us that were improper. It was improper to say the things that they said. I mean, I'm not going to repeat that, but what I'm saying is it just, yeah, there was a lot of police brutality during that time. And whether you were part of it or not, you were going to experience it depending on the situation. You walk in the street even after 10 o'clock at night and you ran into a white police officer, he

[4] "Jersey City Negroes Charge Cop Brutality," *Tucson Citizen,* July 16, 1959; "Appeal Police Exoneration," *New York Age,* August 8, 1959.
[5] *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980*, 1st ed. (Houndmills, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 1-2.
[6] "Clergymen Hit 'Change for Worse': Priests and City Start Planning Downtown 'Operation Face-Lift,'" *Jersey Journal,* January 5, 1960; "City Pastor Urging Rehabilitation of Housing," *The Jersey Advocate,* January 7, 1960; "City Launches Crackdown on 1-Rm. Housing Racket," *Daily News,* January 27, 1960. Copies of these three newspaper articles can be found within the "Priests' Committee for Downtown Jersey City" Scrapbook held at the Jersey City Public Library - Priscilla Gardner Branch.

had something to say to you that wasn't nice. Whether you did something wrong or not didn't matter.”[7]

Emily: These stories of police violence were not rare.

Mariano Vega: “It was common knowledge. I mean when I say common knowledge, you ask anybody about who got beat up lately and they would recite you chapter in verse of who got beat up, what was he doing? No, you don't ask because it was irrelevant. He just got beat up … um and they put you in the back, then they have their batons and they hit you with their baton a few times and you feel it. It was just common I mean, it was all over the place.”[8]

Emily: And it was hard to find ways to make the violence stop.

Carlos Vazquez: “The police were very responsible for a lot of bad things that happened. The police beat up a lot of people, hurt a lot of people [...] We had, we had neighborhood police officers. They were always around, you know, you knew their names, you know, you knew their names and everything. But they were, I don't know if you've ever heard of this, the, it's not a saying, but if a cop kicks your ass, you know it, you know what I mean, and whenever, they would catch us doing something away from home or whatever. They would grab us and they would literally kick us in the ass. I mean, with these big guys, with these big shoes would, I mean, I'd seen a couple guys get hurt like that. But you go home, you can't say nothing about it because you know, got the cops to deal with. So we put up with a lot of that. There were even Hispanic cops who were in on this, because of course, they were trying to make it in the police force. And they would specifically go after Hispanics in order to make it look like they were doing their job. I don’t understand what’s the background of it, but there was a lot of that going on.[9]

Emily: Nidia López, Mariano Vega, and Carlos Vazquez, who we just heard from respectively, all grew up for some time in Jersey City’s downtown area in the 1950s and 60s. They were all children of Puerto Rican migrants, and their experiences were not unique to Jersey City. Omar Barbour, a former Black Panther Party member, who grew up in Asbury Park, New Jersey, and Queens in NYC, also remembers stories of police violence in his neighborhoods and cities across the country during this time.

Omar Barbour: The police abuse and brutality was so prevalent during those times and they were the occupying force. Make no doubt about it. People may not experience at that time, but you go back and look, they were an occupying force. That's why they said with the police riot.

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[7] Nidia López, interview by Emily Sanchez, January 2023 (Newark, NJ: New Jersey Hispanic Research Information Center (HRIC), Podcast Interviews).
[8] Mariano Vega, interview by Emily Sanchez, February 2023 (Newark, NJ: NJ HRIC, Podcast Interviews).
[9] Carlos Vazquez, interview by Emily Sanchez, March 2023 (Newark, NJ: NJ HRIC, Podcast Interviews).

Cause whatever little incident happened, they were coming full force. And it wasn't a question: and let me separate the antagonist and let me try to keep the order was not. It was not peacemaking. It was throwing gasoline on the fire and just exacerbating the situation."[10]

Police violence was present all over the United States in the 1950s and 60s, and working-class residents of color demanded change through protests and demonstrations.

Despite these calls, federal policymakers poured more funding into the policing of urban areas.

[Transition music - "Inspiring Cinematic Ambient" by Lexin_Music]

Part IV: Policies Passed Under the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations

While federal officials, including President Kennedy and his advisors, had taken notice of these local movements and their accompanying calls in the [early] 1960s, they also had been following the work of leading social scientists who promoted the concept of "social pathology." According to this idea, poverty and crime within communities of color were the result of individuals and families, not the result of a larger system that maintained underfunded schools, redlining, lack of access to decent and affordable housing, etc.[11] Some scholars went so far as to describe poor, urban Black youth as "social dynamite" and "dangerous."[12] Informed by this framework, federal officials aimed to design programs that addressed the behavior of individuals instead of creating programs that aimed to specifically address structural inequalities.[13]

In 1961, Congress passed the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act. With this law, federal officials made programs rooted in the idea of social pathology a reality. The act specifically called for a "total attack" on delinquency and allotted funds to create social programs for youth in low-income urban areas.[14] So, you might be wondering: how did these programs function on the ground – how did they actually work? Let's time travel back to 1960s NYC and look at the Mobilization for Youth agency there as an example.

At first glance, it may seem that the Mobilization for Youth agency was a great organization — it provided free movie nights, camping trips and sports opportunities for youth throughout NYC![15] But, after closer examination and analysis of the agency's mission statement, we can see that the

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[10] Omar Barbour, interview by Emily Sanchez, January 2023 (Newark, NJ: NJ HRIC, Podcast Interviews).
[11] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 31.
[12] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 29.
[13] To learn more about how understandings of poverty today continue to be connected to this idea of social/cultural pathology, see Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*, 1st edition (Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2016), 49.
[14] Hinton, *From War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 32-33.
[15] Hinton, *From War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 45.

motive behind the creation of these opportunities was rooted in racist understanding of poverty within communities of color.

Let's look at this mission statement ourselves and draw our own conclusions: In the words of the agency, the Mobilization for Youth's objectives were to "make educationally, culturally, and economically disadvantaged members of minority groups more employable by helping to increase work and work-related skills and helping them develop a suitable 'work personality'."[16] *Could you paraphrase Mobilization for Youth's mission statement? Who or what were they targeting? And, according to them, what changes were necessary to address poverty? Stop here for two minutes, reflect on these questions, and when you come back, I'll share some of my own thoughts ...

[Transition music - "Lifelike" by AlexiAction]

From my understanding, the Mobilization for Youth agency mainly targeted individual behavior, or in their words "work personalities," of poor working-class people of color in NYC. In the eyes of the agency, the problem of poverty and crime within communities of color was not accessibility to decent jobs, decent housing, equal educational opportunities — the problem was in the behavior of individuals and them not being "suitable workers." The organization followed the trend at the time of blaming poverty and crime on poor people of color and not on the structural inequality that was actually the root cause.[17]

To many working-class people of color, it was clear that these programs were not very effective. Rather than seeing the federal government implement programs that directly addressed structural inequalities at the root of poverty, working-class people of color in cities across the country saw the Kennedy Administration support programs that targeted perceived pathologies. Under the Lyndon Johnson Administration, these programs expanded and became part of Johnson's War on Poverty.[18] We'll get into how the War on Poverty looked like and developed from 1964 onwards in our next episode.

These policies and programs, birthed from the social pathology framework, formed part of the context of the 1964 Jersey City rebellion. In fact, during the summer of 1964, residents in cities across the country took to the streets to protest continued racial and economic inequality.[19]

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[16] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 42.
[17] For more discussion on the Mobilization for Youth's programs and goals at length, see Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 42-45.
[18] Hinton, *From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime*, 49.
[19] Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation,* 39; For more on the history of "long hot summers," see the introduction of Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America*, 2014th edition (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[Transition music - “We Are The People” by Soundbay]

Part III. Jersey City Rebellion: “Why did residents rebel?”

The first rebellion of that summer occurred in Harlem on July 16th, 1964, when LT. Thomas Gilligan shot and killed a Black student. This student was 15-year-old James Powell. For the next six days, about 4,000 people rebelled in Harlem’s streets. The NYPD violently arrested many of the rebellion participants.[20]

At the end of the six days, 1 rebellion participant was killed, over a hundred were injured, and 450 were arrested.[21]

Omar Barbour, mentioned earlier, was also present in the 1964 Harlem Rebellion. He was around 13 years old at the time.

Omar Barbour: We went there because we wanted to find what was going on. And it's interesting cause it was a rebellion as opposed to a riot. But it was a police inspired riot. Same as I think that was initiated stuff in the Newark riots and a lot of other so-called riots. There was some kind of abuse that was done that triggered it. The frustration was already built up and just took a flicker to start a powder keg. And that's what it was. [...]

Although we didn't really understand the significance of it. All we know is that you got masses of people and everybody's angry and they ready to what they say at the time “throw down.” So we really didn't understand it, the total significance of it. You know, 13 years old we was ready. But we know we was rebelling against something that was oppressive.[22]

This rebellion ended on July 22, 1964 — two days later, another uprising occurred in Rochester, New York.[23] On July 24, Rochester police officers forcefully arrested a Black man, Randy Manigault while he was intoxicated. The police officers used an unnecessary amount of force to arrest Manigault, and this led to protests from bystanders.

A couple [of] days later, on August 2, 1964, two police officers forcibly arrested Dolores Shannon outside her home building in the predominantly Black Lafayette neighborhood in Jersey

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[20] Spencer Stultz, “The Harlem Race Riot of 1964,” BlackPast.org, accessed March 2023, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/harlem-race-riot-1964/; Hansi Lo Wang, host, “New York’s ‘Night of Birmingham Horror’ Sparked A Summer of Riots,” Code Switch, July 18, 2014, accessed March 2023, https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/07/18/330108773/new-yorks-night-of-birmingham-horror-sparked-a-summer-of-riots.

[21] Spencer Stultz, “The Harlem Race Riot of 1964,” BlackPast.org, accessed March 2023, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/harlem-race-riot-1964/.

[22] Omar Barbour, interview by Emily Sanchez, January 2023 (Newark, NJ: NJ HRIC, Podcast Interviews).

[23] Spencer Stultz, “The Harlem Race Riot of 1964,” BlackPast.org, accessed March 2023, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/harlem-race-riot-1964/; Rachel Campbell, “Rochester Rebellion (July 1964),” BlackPast.org, accessed March 2023, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/rochester-rebellion-july-1964/.

City. When the officers were arresting her, Shannon leaned down to say something to her young son. At that moment, one of the officers beat Shannon on her neck with a nightstick. A passerby and neighborhood resident, Sarah Walton, tried to stop the cop. Seeing that the cop did not listen, Walter Mays, who was also a resident of the neighborhood, approached the officer and asked, "Why did you hit her?" In response, the officer punched Mays in the stomach. Mays had just been in the hospital for treatment of stomach ulcers. For the next three nights, hundreds of residents in the Lafayette neighborhood rebelled.[24]

Although Omar Barbour was living in Queens, he remembers hearing about the Jersey City rebellion because he had family living there and later became comrades with folks who participated in the rebellions through the Black Panther Party. He recalled the conditions of the rebellion — in 1964, both poverty and the police presence were high in the Lafayette neighborhood.

Omar Barbour: And in Jersey City at that time, you had very little political representation. That was one of the underpinnings of that [rebellion] too.

Emily: In 1964, there was just one African American city councilperson, Fred Martin. He had been elected just three years prior, in 1961.[25] And, as you might remember from the last episode, there were also limitations on where you could physically move in the city, depending on your race. Part of the Lafayette Neighborhood was called the …

Omar Barbour: Hill was some, well actually blacks were not allowed past that junctions, which separates the Hill from downtown. We're not even allowed to come up in that area. There was these codified restrictions between the Irish and the Italians. So it's a very polarized city. And that was one thing that I did know about being here, that it was very polarized. And certain sections you did not go in and it was unknown that you couldn't go in." ~Omar Barbour[26]

Daoud-David Williams, who was a resident of Jersey City at the time and later became a member of the Jersey City Black Panther chapter, also knew folks who rebelled. When asked why people rebelled, Williams explained:

Daoud-David Williams: Well, they're the same reasons now. Lack of social, economic justice, racism, classism you know, could go on and on along those lines. People just being fed up with

[24] "Fred Martin Smiles – But Fears the Future," *Jersey Journal,* August 5, 1964; "Brutality Issue — Negroes Allege Police Brutality," *Hudson Dispatch,* August 4, 1964; Will Mack, "The Jersey City Uprising (1964)," BlackPast.org, https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1964-jersey-city-uprising-1964/.
[25] "Editorial: Jersey City loses a local icon of change," *Jersey Journal,* July 14, 2014, https://www.nj.com/opinion/2014/07/editorial_jersey_city_loses_a_local_icon_of_change.html; "Jersey City Calm, Whelad Assailed [sic]," *The New York Times,* August 6, 1964.
[26] Omar Barbour, interview by Emily Sanchez, January 2023 (Newark, NJ: NJ HRIC, Podcast Interviews).

the level of oppression or brutality and people getting away with everything from murder to other harms. And the disparity out here and the level of poverty that's here, which is still, we see it every day here in this country. The level of poverty and so forth, and how people are treated and you know, you see it today. Whether it's immigration through the Southern border, this kind of thing has been going on for a long time.[27]

Emily: As Williams begins to allude to, the conditions of rebellions continue to our present moment. And some of the reasons why we see this continuation are the policy decisions made by federal officials after 1964. These policies affected the daily lives of working-class residents of color on many levels. We won't get into exactly how until the next episode, but in the meantime, I want you to make a couple [of] predictions on your own about what happens next.

Given how policymakers approached solutions to poverty in the early 1960s, how do you think policymakers will respond to the rebellions of 1964? Will they respond to the grievances of rebellion participants, or will they create policies that ignore their demands? Or something in between?

I know these are a lot of questions, and you might be feeling a little overwhelmed. You don't have to have clear answers to them right now. You can keep these answers at the back of your mind as you reflect on the episode and the current events of today. Next time, we'll continue pondering these questions when examining policies post-1964 and the Jersey City rebellions of 1970.

Everybody, thanks so much for listening! If you'd like to learn more about the sources I used for this podcast, check out my footnotes at the bottom of each page of the transcript — all transcripts are located on the Newark Public Library (NPL) website. For educators, you can also access accompanying lesson plans, including worksheets and in-class activities, at the NPL website as well. And to all listeners out there, if you liked what you heard and would like to share this podcast — please do. It is available on all major streaming platforms.

Our intro theme music is "Got To Have Freedom" by the Spirit of Life Ensemble. Our transition music is from Pixabay. And our outro theme music is "Powerful Beat" by Penguin Music (also on Pixabay).

Thank you to everyone who made this series possible – everyone part of the HRIC staff, all educators who have given me their time, the staff at the MakerSpace at the Newark Public Library, and the ReachOut Fellowship program. For today's episode, I send special thank you's to the Community Awareness Series and the Biblioteca Criolla in Jersey City.

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[27] Daoud-David Williams, interview by Emily Sanchez, January 2023 (Newark, NJ: NJ HRIC, Podcast Interviews).

I’m Emily Sánchez, your host for *Demanding Justice in New Jersey*.