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**'DEATH OF A UNION MAN': RECONSTRUCTING CONFLICT AT WINDSOR
CHRYSLER DURING THE LONG SEVENTIES**

By

Heat Harvie

A Major Research Paper
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of History
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts
at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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**'DEATH OF A UNION MAN': RECONSTRUCTING CONFLICT AT WINDSOR
CHRYSLER DURING THE LONG SEVENTIES**

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April 25, 2023

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ABSTRACT

The shooting of UAW Local 444 President Charles “Charlie” Brooks in January 1977 by former Chrysler worker Clarence Talbot, allegedly over a grievance, brought the city of Windsor, Ontario to a standstill. Recently fired from his position as a relief worker at the Chrysler plant, Talbot was in a very vulnerable position where his ability to survive hinged on a successful grievance. Brooks was a beloved labour leader noted for his radical and colourful ways who had a long history of working hard for union and community members through his advocacy. The Ontario Supreme Court ultimately declared Talbot not criminally responsible by reason of insanity resulting in an indefinite rehabilitative sentence to a mental asylum. These men’s lives and Brooks’ death can be better understood by historically examining the systems that surrounded them, especially by examining the social forces that shaped the expectations placed on them by their communities. Using academic sources and newspaper accounts of these events, this paper seeks to analyze factors that may have contributed to the shooting and the context in which it occurred. At a time when discussions of labour rights, civil rights and the criminal justice system are once again enflamed, this story seems especially apt for re-examination.

DEDICATION

The following paper is dedicated to the people it is written about, all the workers who fight to navigate a system that is hostile to their needs. This paper is dedicated to telling the uncomfortable or less flattering histories that exist as a warning to our present. This paper is dedicated to the memory of Charles “Charlie” Brooks who I hope would appreciate my efforts to understand the bigger picture around his death. To the memory of Clarence Leslie Talbot, I hope that this paper shows him as man who was navigating a confusing and challenging world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION

On January 17, 1977, Clarence Talbot went to the offices of the UAW Local 444 to meet with union President Charles “Charlie” Brooks about his latest dismissal and the resulting grievance.¹ Talbot had been fired in March 1976 for excessive absenteeism, and had been pressing for a grievance for nearly a year when he went to the meeting at the Turner Road headquarters of the Local.² Talbot been told that the union would speak to the company on his behalf, indicating that a grievance had at least been considered.³ It is unclear from reports whether a grievance had been actively pursued for this firing.⁴ Ray Lebert, the union’s Second-Vice-President, was one of the people in the meeting and he thought everything went well and that Talbot had been appeased by their responses to his inquiries.⁵ Lebert later told reporters that while there was a small disagreement with Brooks, Talbot “shook [his] hand and said ‘thanks Ray’ and walked out.”⁶ While union officials may have thought the meeting went well, it would seem Talbot did not. He went to his car to fetch a .44 calibre Magnum rifle and re-entered the offices.⁷ When people cried out that a man with a gun had entered the building, Lebert unsuccessfully attempted to wrest the gun away from Talbot while others ran to hide with Brooks in an office.⁸

¹ Jeremy Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear: Violence at Work in the North American Auto Industry, 1960-80*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2017), 147.

² Susan Brown, “Murder Suspect Faces Life in Windsor UAW shooting,” *Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI), Jan. 19, 1977.

³ Canadian Press, “UAW official shot to death,” *Ottawa Journal* (Ottawa, CA), Jan. 18, 1977.

⁴ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 147. Gord Henderson and Paul Patterson, “Suspect arraigned in Brooks slaying,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.

⁵ Canadian Press, “Suspect arrested: Windsor UAW Leader Shot,” *Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.

⁶ Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.”

⁷ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 148. & Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.”

⁸ Canadian Press, “Ex-auto worker held in union chief’s death,” *Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver, BC), Jan. 18, 1977. Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.” Gord Henderson and Paul Patterson, “Clarence Talbot charged in Brooks’ death,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 18, 1977. According to Henderson and Patterson, Ray Lebert was wracked with guilt after the murder for not being able to disarm Talbot saying, “I just couldn’t hang onto it. If I could have this wouldn’t have happened.”

Talbot continued to the office and when bullets began firing through the locked door of the office, the four men hiding there “hit the deck.”⁹ Talbot left the building and broke a hole in an exterior window of the office, pushing the gun’s barrel through it and calling out “Where’s Charlie?” as Brooks hid behind a metal desk.¹⁰ Talbot came back into the building and kicked the office door open, ordering the other officials out of the room before shooting Brooks at least four times—once in the leg, once in the chest, once through his abdomen and chest, and a final fatal shot to his head.¹¹ Another union official’s attempt to stop Talbot as he was leaving the scene did not result in further shooting, only a “scuffle.”¹² Police arrived under a minute after the incident concluded and Talbot surrendered himself into custody without issue.¹³ Charles “Charlie” Brooks was pronounced dead soon after at 1:45 pm.¹⁴ In the wake of this tragedy, people questioned why Brooks was the target of Talbot’s alleged rage. The news media, courts, and medical system all attempted to provide an explanation to assuage the concerns of the public.

Historical events do not occur in isolation. We can use single events to explore the broader contexts in which they occurred. By complicating a case that was simplified in its public narrative, we can gain greater insights into the motivations and stressors that may have influenced the actions of one individual as they react to the world that they lived in. This reconstruction of the narrative will observe the conceptions and influences of class and race on the socio-economic dynamics of Windsor in the late 1970s. To

⁹ Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.”

¹⁰ Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.”

¹¹ Canadian Press, “Suspect arrested.” Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.”

¹² Canadian Press, “UAW boss shot,” *The Province* (Vancouver, BC), Jan. 18, 1977.

¹³ Henderson, “Suspect arraigned.”

¹⁴ Canadian Press, “Ex-auto worker held.”

attempt to understand how these events were perceived by the public at the time one must examine how the case was presented by the media and experts. We can never know definitively what caused Talbot to target Brooks that day, but by looking at the events and responses to the event we can try to understand perceptions and repercussions of the crime.

Through an analysis of this case, we can also gain an understanding of the relationships between power and violence in the workplace. There are three major power structures that held sway over the lives of individual workers in unionized workplaces: the Union, the Company, and the State.¹⁵ These three powers collectively influenced cultures of violence in industrial workplaces that caused suffering among workers, occasionally culminating in violent expressions like the killing of Brooks. It is possible Brooks was targeted by Talbot because his role as union president positioned him between the rank-and-file members and Chrysler in a bureaucratic system of labour relations, placing Brooks and other Union executives as intermediaries in Chrysler's disciplinary actions against Talbot and other workers. Like many workers, Talbot likely felt frustrated and lacked control over his livelihood because powerful entities, the Company, and the Union, ruled over his status as part of the labour force. The development of a bureaucratic union, with an executive branch who had special communication privileges with the company, created a tiered power structure within the union which resulted in the isolation of the rank-and-file from union processes. Chrysler's disciplinary system's structure obscured the role of the company in its processes, leading to confusion among workers as to who discipline came from, in this

¹⁵ Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart, 1992), 368-9.

case with deadly consequence. Canadian press coverage of the case dichotomized Brooks as a hero and Talbot as a villainous figure.

This case is unusual in that it crosses a ‘colour-line’ that is rarely addressed within Windsor. By examining media responses, we can begin to understand the Canadian policy of silence when it comes to national issues of race and racism. Race was eerily absent from public discussion of this case, though stereotypes and other structural elements of racism are always present when race is discussed. The media relies on cultural shorthand like stereotypes when conveying messages to their readership. Anti-Blackness and other forms of oppression can intersect, mediate, and complicate each other, increasing an individual’s vulnerability with each additional oppression faced.¹⁶ For example, the risk of police violence against Black individuals is significantly higher if they are experiencing a mental health crisis during the interaction.¹⁷

There were two major psychoanalytical arguments experts at the time may have put forward to explain Talbot’s actions: one pointing at individualistic triggers of personal madness, and the other to a rage response induced by macro-pressures of existence in a racist, classist society. The processes for dealing with those deemed criminal and those deemed insane overlapped as they had since the beginnings of institutional responses to mental health in the eighteenth century. A comparison to similar cases, one a precedent-setting Canadian case and the other an American case that echoes the Brooks killing is used to analyze the possible and outcome of Talbot’s trial and its’ public reception. A declaration of sanity would result in imprisonment, no matter the

¹⁶ Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present*, (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing), 12.

¹⁷ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 105-6.

explanation for Talbot's actions the outcome would likely have been the same-- placement in a facility. No matter what caused it, a determination of insanity would result in institutionalization in a mental asylum. By examining the dialectics of madness and criminality between experts and media we might begin to consider how people at the time understood this crime.

CHAPTER 2 - HISTORIOGRAPHY AND SOURCE ANALYSIS

Along with the literature on race, identity and colonialism, this study draws on insights from works exploring the social and cultural effects of the overall decline in the North American industrial sector. These sources will provide historical context and help establish an understanding of the tense labour environment of the mid-1970s as individuals, corporations and the state struggled to cope with a changing economic world. The Eighties and Nineties saw a wave of leftist Canadian labour histories, mostly in the form of comprehensive macro-analyses of union and worker experiences in the twentieth century. Charlotte A.B. Yates' 1993 comprehensive history of the politics of post-war Canadian labour politics details and critiques the few interventions the Canadian government has made in the realm of industrial relations in Canada between the late 1930s into the early 1990s.¹⁸ Craig Heron's 1996 book *The Canadian Labour Movement* is a broad overview in the development of unions in Canada that uses a macro lens to consolidate stories that are often regionalized into one national narrative.¹⁹ Building off of Paul Gilroy's 1993 text, *The Black Atlantic*, Black cultural theorists like Rinaldo

¹⁸ Charlotte Alyce Bronwen Yates, *From Plant to Politics: The Autoworkers Union in Postwar Canada*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

¹⁹ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Brief History*, (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1996).

Walcott point out that Black Canadian identity is produced through hybridity, built on a diverse system of diasporic cultures meeting and mingling in the shadow of colonialism.²⁰ By exploring public narratives of race, class, and gender we can understand how some individuals are cast as Other at a local or individual level.

Talbot's experiences at Chrysler were shaped by the formal and informal socio-political power hierarchies that developed in an echo of those that exist outside the plant. By his own claim the source of some controversy among labour historians, Bryan D. Palmer's 1992 second edition of *Working Class Experience* observes class as a cultural process where workers collectively are a "social entity" within the "productive relations" that act and react to changes to the labour and economic systems.²¹ Palmer laments labour historian's tendencies to focus too heavily on either union leadership or on the rank-and-file while avoiding discussions of how these two demographics interacted within the internal power structures of the union.²² Graduate student Michael J. Oberemk's political science study explores his coworkers' perceptions of power dynamics at the Windsor Chrysler Assembly Plant from 1982-3, just five years after Brooks' death.²³ Jeremy Milloy's *Blood, Sweat and Fear* from 2017 utilizes labour theory arguments about violence in the workplace through a lens of gender and Marxism, focusing on the construction of masculine, working-class identity.²⁴ Using extensive

²⁰ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993). Michelle A. Johnson and Funké Aladejebi, eds, *Unsettling the Great White North: Black Canadian History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 591. Gamal Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man? Black Masculinities and Sporting Cultures*, (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005), 132-3.

²¹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, preface & 20-23.

²² Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 370-1.

²³ Michael J. Oberemk, "Autoworkers and the Work Environment: A Study of Worker Attitudes Toward Quality, Power and the U.A.W. at Chrysler's Windsor Assembly Plant," *Thesis (M.A.)*, (University of Waterloo: 1988).

²⁴ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*.

labour archives at each of the plant's locals, and in the Wayne State University Walter P. Reuther Labor Archive in Detroit, Milloy pieces together grievances, newsletters, and other materials to investigate incidences of violence. Milloy used the Chrysler plants in Detroit and Windsor as a comparative case study to examine the causes of workplace violence, and how "power disparities of class, race and gender... were crucial in fostering violence at work."²⁵ Daniel McNeil noted that the intersecting of African, Caribbean, American and British identities in Canadian cities creates a perfect case to observe the creation of a Black Atlantic transnational identity.²⁶ As a colonial nation, Canada must vigilantly maintain identities of Otherness within its boundary to maintain its power structures.

The marketplace is not a neutral or natural entity; the economy is rooted in the social and political forces.²⁷ Black worker's experiences of racism in Windsor and its auto plants can be understood as one part of a process of racialization and gendering labour under capitalism.²⁸ According to Fanon, "all racism- in particular anti-Negro fascism" functions as part of "a gigantic work of economic and biological subjugation."²⁹ Michael Keith Honey's book *Black Workers Remember* addresses the many struggles Black workers faced to gain employment and adequate representation for themselves within the industrial workplaces in the United States.³⁰ While Honey's work focuses on

²⁵ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 11.

²⁶ Johnson, *Unsettling*, 596-7.

²⁷ Barrington Walker, *The African Canadian Legal Odyssey: Historical Essays*, (Toronto: Published for The Osgoode Society for Canadian legal history by University of Toronto Press, 2012), 425-6.

²⁸ Johnson, *Unsettling*, 593.

²⁹ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* translated by Steve Corcoran, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 130.

³⁰ Michael Keith Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001).

the American experience, it can be used comparatively to explore the Black Canadian workers' experience. Primarily based on the oral histories of twelve Black men who were retired autoworkers, Pamela Sugiman's 2001 article in *Labour/Le Travail* focuses on intersectional oppression in mid-century Canadian auto work and shows that Black male workers experienced a different labour struggle than their white counterparts.³¹ Mensah challenges the Marxist idea that racism has its roots in capitalism's need to generate competition between workers, arguing racism existed prior to capitalism so must not be explained purely through economic means.³² Companies play a role in sustaining systemic racism when they exploit existing socio-political differences to their economic benefit.

In the past few years, Canadian labour history has begun to investigate the idea of structural violence in the industrial workplace. Writing for the *Urban History Review*, Steven High reflected on the emotional and mental toll of deindustrialization on working class people and how the violence of these changes are experienced differently based on an individuals' race and gender.³³ In his book *Industrial Sunset*, Steven High reads deindustrialization through an anthropological lens to understand the effects of plant closures on communities.³⁴ He considered the inherent structural violence associated with

³¹ Pamela Sugiman, "Privilege and Oppression: The Configuration of Race, Gender, and Class in Southern Ontario Auto Plants, 1939-1949." *Labour/Le Travail* (Halifax) (2001): 309-113.

³² Joseph Mensah, *Black Canadians: History, Experience, Social Conditions (Second Edition)*, (Halifax and Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2010), 27-8.

³³ Steven High, "The 'Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power': Recognizing the Structural Violence of Deindustrialization as Loss," *Urban History Review* 48, no. 2 (2021): 97-115.

³⁴ Steven High, *Industrial Sunset: The Making of North America's Rust Belt, 1969-1984*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

engagement with industrialized labour, and with mass suffering inflicted by factory closures on the communities that once supported a company's existence.³⁵

As this paper addresses the way that Talbot was treated in the courts and in the media, it is useful to draw on literature that explores the “criminalization” of Black men. Fears of Blackness are “euphemistically articulated through a fear of crime and treated as such by the state” resulting in over-policing and profiling of Black individuals as criminals.³⁶ As Robyn Maynard claims, in Canada the over-surveillance of Black people leads to a “self-fulfilling prophecy” of Black criminality.³⁷ When authorities are more likely to pursue and convict racialized defendants, it reinforces assumptions about Black criminality.³⁸ Those resistant to “biopolitical revision” or considered to be “incapable of disciplining themselves” are classed as criminals, part of an underclass of the society that is written into law.³⁹ The pathologizing of Blackness was used to justify psychological and physical violence against Black Canadians.⁴⁰ In her 2008 study on the use of insanity defenses in the Canadian criminal justice system, Kimberly White argues that cultural ideas about race shape the criminalization process, and how both court experts and juries perceive the individual on trial.⁴¹ The categorization of individuals as ‘criminal’ was decided by criteria which is determined by the “cultural beliefs around race mixed with concerns about sexuality and social order to produce particular interpretations of

³⁵ High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’,” 97-115.

³⁶ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 86-7.

³⁷ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 87-8.

³⁸ Kimberley White, *Negotiating Responsibility: Law, Murder, and States of Mind*, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 96.

³⁹ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 427.

⁴⁰ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 229-230.

⁴¹ White, *Negotiating Responsibility*, 49.

responsibility, criminality, and mental deficiency” which then influenced those who “define legal, popular, and psychiatric representations of normalcy and degeneracy.”⁴²

Much of the information about the events that occurred comes from the *Windsor Star* and other Canadian newspapers that covered the case in detail not only at the time of the shooting but retrospectively over the years as milestones brought it back into public consciousness. Two major sociological reports commissioned by the state in that period provide some insights into the experiences of the Black community. The 1965 ‘Helling Report’ was funded by the Ontario Human Rights Commission to synthesize and compare the history and experiences of Black, Italian, and Chinese Canadians in the cities of Windsor and Hamilton.⁴³ This report was meant to evaluate the outcomes of the 1951 passing of the *Fair Employment Practices Act* in Ontario.⁴⁴ Another report from 1982 called *Race Relations in Windsor: A Situation Report* was compiled by James Chacko for Jim Fleming, the Canadian Minister of Multiculturalism, in response to a Gallup Poll finding that 30% of Canadian public wanted to “keep Canada an all-white nation.”⁴⁵ The Chacko *Report* compiled data from curriculums, media sources, and a one day seminar on race relations, then made forty recommendations for changes that could be made to those systems and to Windsor society in order to make the city more equitable for “Visible Minority Groups” in the face of increasing racial tensions.⁴⁶ The Helling Report noted that almost all Black Windsorites surveyed in the 1960s felt that they had

⁴² White, *Negotiating Responsibility*, 81 & 92.

⁴³ R. A. Helling, *The Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians in the Social Structure of Windsor, Ontario*, (Toronto: Ontario Human Rights Commission, 1965)

⁴⁴ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 9.

⁴⁵ James Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor: A Situation Report*, (Windsor: Minister of Multiculturalism, 1982), 11.

⁴⁶ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, ii-viii.

experienced discrimination due to racism.⁴⁷ Michelle Johnson came to a similar conclusion over half a century later, that Black Canadians are relegated to a “liminal status” of being considered “not only not-quite-citizens but also not-quite-settlers” within Canada.⁴⁸ No matter how established Black Canadian communities were, they were still seen as an “Other” within the larger community of Windsor.

CHAPTER 3 - TALBOT’S WINDSOR

Born April 2, 1949, Clarence Talbot was thirty-six years old at the time of the shooting.⁴⁹ He had reportedly endured a “brutal” upbringing.⁵⁰ It was reported that Talbot needed the income from this job at Chrysler to support his ten children.⁵¹ His address of record was 850 Windsor Ave. which would put him in the heart of the largest Black community in the City of Windsor.⁵² One of the few Black employees at Windsor Chrysler, Talbot worked as a “relief man” filling in for other workers as they went for their breaks.⁵³ Talbot had worked at the plant for twelve years, and had been fired on several occasions, each time receiving his job back after a grievance by the union.⁵⁴ Talbot had been fired in March for 1976 and he had been pressing for this latest grievance for almost a year at the time of Brooks’ death.⁵⁵ According to the press the day after the killing, he had been fired

⁴⁷ Helling, *The Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 86.

⁴⁸ Johnson et al., eds., *Unsettling*, 41.

⁴⁹ Legacy, “Clarence Talbot Obituary,” (*Windsor Star*, 2023)

<https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/windsorstar/obituary.aspx?n=clarence-talbot&pid=157220244> (Accessed on March 23, 2023).

⁵⁰ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75.

⁵¹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 147.

⁵² Gord Henderson and Paul Patterson, “Clarence Talbot Charged in Brook’s Death.” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 18, 1977; Helling, *The Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 7.

[For more information on the McDougall Street Corridor please see the excellent work of my peer Willow Key and her team at this Website: <https://collections.uwindsor.ca/omeka-s/we-were-here/welcome>]

⁵³ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 147.

⁵⁴ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 147.

⁵⁵ Brown, “Murder Suspect Faces Life.”

for absenteeism and “a poor work record.”⁵⁶ Grievances had to be submitted through the Union, so without their support Talbot would have been unable to fight for his job back this time.⁵⁷ Talbot’s past grievances had been successful and he likely had faith in the union’s ability to advocate for him. Perhaps a complication in the grievance process was one stressor too many in a life of strife, the metaphorical ‘straw that broke the camel’s back’ resulting in the shooting of Brooks. Talbot’s life, and the subsequent conflict that developed between him and his union also needs to be understood within the wider context of race relations in Windsor in the 1970s.

Despite a long history in the region, the Black community made up just under one percent of the population of Essex County in 1961.⁵⁸ Black Windsorites experienced discrimination at higher levels than other marginalized groups in the city.⁵⁹ Of no known relation to Clarence, Lyle Talbot’s 1982 Master’s thesis was based on surveys that asked Black Windsorites about their “distinct” experiences with racism in the city.⁶⁰ The difficulties Black people in Windsor faced could not be dismissed as an issue of “difficult personalities” and their challenges were rooted in discrimination that was built into the structure of the society.⁶¹ Helling believed that racism would persist even if other oppressive forces were alleviated.⁶² Black Windsorites were concentrated in a handful of neighbourhoods through the city, with the largest being Talbot’s, centered around

⁵⁶ Canadian Press, “Ex-auto worker held in union chief’s death.” Dave Battagello, “Violent deaths Stalk family of Brooks’ killer,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan 24, 2012.

⁵⁷ Oberemk, “Autoworkers,” 19.

⁵⁸ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 6.

⁵⁹ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 115.

⁶⁰ Talbot, Lyle E. “The Distinctive Character of Racism in Canada.” Thesis (M.A.), (University of Windsor, 1982).

⁶¹ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 111-2.

⁶² Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 107.

McDougall Street with about two hundred and fifty families living there.⁶³ A map in Helling's report outlined the area between the Detroit River and Giles Avenue at the north and south ends and between Ouellette Avenue and Parent Avenue at the west and east as a neighbourhood with a "high concentration" of Black families and individuals.⁶⁴ Prior to World War Two, Black people in Windsor were generally barred from entering theatres, taverns, restaurants, and other public venues in the city. Conditions gradually improved after 1947 but the legacy of these practices continued to be felt.⁶⁵ In Essex country, there were areas known to be "sundown towns" where Black individuals were not welcome to live or visit. However the formal labeling of these spaces was not permitted—a "whites only" sign erected at a local beach was removed due to public outcry at the open display of racism.⁶⁶ According to Windsor Black activist Lyle Talbot, a Black militancy group or organization would have not been possible anywhere in Canada because the Black population is low, less than five percent at the highest concentration.⁶⁷ Windsor was a hostile environment for Black people, but this was obscured by the often subtle nature of Canadian racism.⁶⁸ Chacko surveyed the media, historical and academic resources, and interviewed community members and found that institutional discrimination was present in the city.⁶⁹ While Canadians may try to discursively distance themselves from racism, studies have shown that they have "roughly similar in their attitudes and behaviours toward racial minorities" to

⁶³ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 7. ["Most Canadian Cities had a district where the majority of Black residents lived" with "racially restrictive covenants" in other neighbourhoods to keep Black families out. Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 251.]

⁶⁴ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 122.

⁶⁵ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 16.

⁶⁶ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 17.

⁶⁷ Talbot*, "Distinctive Character," 34 & 80. *No known relation to Clarence.

⁶⁸ Talbot, "Distinctive Character," 40 & 58.

⁶⁹ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, ii.

Americans.⁷⁰ Talbot's brother, Clayton Talbert, was an executive at the Ford plant's Local and he reported that "Windsor was a very, very bad place to live if you are black."⁷¹

Discrimination was built into the structure of Windsor's schools and Black students were faced with many unnecessary obstacles to attaining an adequate education. Educational discrimination had a negative influence on Black students in Windsor and often served to 'stream' students into the labour force rather than supporting Black youth to grow and learn.⁷² Black Canadians were "stereotyped and victimized by [the] educational system" and in the 1970s it was still unusual for Black Canadians to finish high school all the way through Grade Thirteen.⁷³ School facilities for Black children were often subpar. As late as 1964, Black parents in Essex County had to fight to have their children attend a new school being built in neighbouring Harrow instead of maintaining the crumbling SS#11 Colchester South, the last segregated school in the province.⁷⁴ One individual who spoke to Johnson about the essentially segregated Mercer Street school in Windsor said that "children of colour were not encouraged" in their education by most teachers and staff.⁷⁵ This school was located in the downtown McDougall corridor neighbourhood where Talbot resided. Counsellors and teachers were known to have openly considered Black children to be "inferior and only good for non-

⁷⁰ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 2.

⁷¹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 154.

⁷² Johnson et al., eds., *Unsettling*, 316.

⁷³ At the time, Grade Thirteen was not required to graduate but was required if one wanted to pursue post-secondary education at the University level. McClain, *Alienation and Resistance*, 5 & 41.

⁷⁴ Johnson et al., eds., *Unsettling*, 325.

⁷⁵ Johnson et al., eds., *Unsettling*, 322; Willow Key, "Education in the McDougall Street Corridor," *We Were Here*, (2023) Accessed April 11, 2023. <https://collections.uwindsor.ca/omeka-s/we-were-here/education-mcdougall-street-corridor>

professional jobs” and parents regularly felt their children had received “very bad treatment and poor vocational direction” from their school.⁷⁶ Many Black students were encouraged by teachers and guidance counsellors to drop out of school to pursue a career in trades or industrial work.⁷⁷ The practice of “streaming” Black children into “lower education tracks,” pressuring them into trades or “low-skill” labour sectors and discouraged from pursuing higher education, stunted individual socio-economic mobility and was an important tool of white supremacy in Canada.⁷⁸

The socio-economic status of Black Canadians was undermined by stigmatization and discrimination which positioned them as an Other or outsider within the nation state.⁷⁹ There was an “organized abandonment” of Black citizens by the Canadian state, resulting in increased rates of poverty, low wages and relegation into marginal or gendered labour.⁸⁰ Prior to World War Two, most people were aware of a colour line that blocked their access to employment in the auto industries of Southwestern Ontario.⁸¹ In 1947 nearly all Black workers in Ontario were employed as common labourers, but things slightly improved after the 1951 passing of the *Fair Employment Practices Act* forbid racial discrimination in the workplace.⁸² The *Act* outlined the right to “equal treatment with respect to employment” in the province of Ontario.⁸³ Equal opportunity in workplaces was not federally instated until much later with the passing of the federal

⁷⁶ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 115-7.

⁷⁷ Talbot, “Distinctive Character,” 21.

⁷⁸ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 213-5.

⁷⁹ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 3.

⁸⁰ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 71.

⁸¹ Sugiman, “Privilege and Oppression,” 88.

⁸² The Fair Employment Practice Act also forbid discrimination on the grounds of creed, colour, nationality, ancestry, or place of origin. Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 9-10.

⁸³ Ontario Human Rights Commission, “Employment,” *Ontario Human Rights Commissions*, Accessed at https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/social_areas/employment#:~:text=The%20Code%20states%20that%20every,record%20of%20offences%2C%20marital%20status%2C March 2023.

Employment Equity Act in 1986.⁸⁴ Over half of Black workers surveyed felt that there were societal limits on their occupational aspirations, with just over one third perceiving those limits as being due to racism—with educational concerns and limits on the job market in general also contributing.⁸⁵ Black workers often found themselves excluded from the skilled trades and left to hardest and dirtiest jobs due to racism in the hiring process.⁸⁶ Of the fifteen largest industries in the city, only one had Black employees in a “professional category” and none in a management role.⁸⁷ Just under fifteen percent of Black workers in Windsor reported unfair treatment by their current employers and just under sixteen percent had been treated poorly by current coworkers.⁸⁸ Many reported being the only Black individual in their workplace, and a majority had experienced discrimination when applying for a job which was almost universally credited to racism.⁸⁹ Mensah calls the job market’s “colour line” one of the most detrimental elements of racial oppression. When people have no jobs, it amplifies other social issues, and it can add to a “struggle-cycle.”⁹⁰

Almost all Black workers were employed in the automotive industry and nine of the fifteen largest companies in Windsor had no Black employees.⁹¹ Despite the passing of equal employment acts, the Windsor Chrysler plant was slow to accept Black employees after openly refusing to hire Black workers for most of its history.⁹² When

⁸⁴ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 240-1.

⁸⁵ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 88-9.

⁸⁶ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 47-8.

⁸⁷ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 10.

⁸⁸ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 80.

⁸⁹ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 83-4.

⁹⁰ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 139.

⁹¹ Helling, *Position of Negroes*, 10.

⁹² Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 8 & 66.

they were critiqued for this in 1953 they hired three Black men, but after that continued to turn away workers based on race.⁹³ Even after the official ban on Black workers ended, the workforce at the Chrysler plant remained “almost exclusively white.”⁹⁴ Chrysler had the worst reputation of “the Big Three” auto companies when it came to its’ racial employment practices.⁹⁵ The dynamics in the Chrysler plant reflected the divisions that were present where the factory was established, amplifying local social issues to exploit them for increased profits.⁹⁶ The auto industry was the best option for financial security for Black workers in Southwestern Ontario once they were able to access employment in the sector starting in the Second World War.⁹⁷ The average income at Chrysler in 1981 was \$18,300 per year, but a worker could make far less money than that if their seniority was low and they were laid off more often.⁹⁸

Periodic layoffs of workers are an essential part of the Fordist industrial system, and auto manufacturing is especially prone to them as each new product requires extensive resets of the factory line to accommodate the variety of products that need to be created to appease the consumer markets.⁹⁹ A common tale of seniority-centric union workplaces is “last to be hired, the first to be fired” and given the difficulties Black workers faced to get hired, they were often in that category.¹⁰⁰ The stakes for Black

⁹³ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 66. This section synthesized Sugiman’s work “Privilege and Oppression.”

⁹⁴ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 78.

⁹⁵ Sugiman, “Privilege and Oppression,” 89.

⁹⁶ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 46-8.

⁹⁷ Sugiman, “Privilege and Oppression”, 93.

⁹⁸ \$18300 would be valued at around \$56,000 in 2022. Oberemk, “Autoworkers,” 70-71.

⁹⁹ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 82.

¹⁰⁰ Philip Sheldon Foner, *Organized Labor and the Black Worker, 1619-1973*. (New York: Praeger, 1974), 188.

workers were much higher if they lost their jobs, as employment discrimination made it that much harder to find new work.¹⁰¹

Racially marginalized workers often found that they were the first to be laid off when work was slow and there were cutbacks by the employer.¹⁰² The Great Recession of the 1970s saw a significant drop in Black employment rates with up to a sixty percent reduction, comparable to Great Depression levels in some regions.¹⁰³ Male breadwinners often experienced a massive shift in their identity and worldview if they lost their job because it generated a shift in how they were perceived by others in their culture.¹⁰⁴ The looming threat of job loss was a constant worry for all workers, though practices like grievances could offer a modicum of hope and security. Windsor's workers were at least exposed to stories of plant closures throughout this period which would have been a source of concern and stress. One difficulty in addressing racism within unions is that the structure of the grievance system has inherent "shortcomings," like the lack of Black representation among the arbitrators of the grievance-- the company and the union.¹⁰⁵ Milloy discussed a study of Sugiman's where an informant said, "he believed that the UAW would fail to follow up on Black workers' grievances unless pushed."¹⁰⁶ Between 1944 and 1946, there were fourteen complaints filed to the UAW International Fair Practices Department regarding Locals failing to pursue grievances on behalf of workers.¹⁰⁷ This is a relatively small number of complaints given how many grievances

¹⁰¹ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 252.

¹⁰² Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 141.

¹⁰³ Foner, *Organized Labor*, 428-9.

¹⁰⁴ High, *Industrial Sunset*, 9 & 43.

¹⁰⁵ Foner, *Organized Labor*, 397-8.

¹⁰⁶ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 67.

¹⁰⁷ Sugiman, "Privilege and Oppression," 96.

can be filed in a year throughout the whole UAW network. There are also many possible obstacles to a worker filing a complaint to this board so we could likely assume a worker frustrated with a Local may choose to not complain to the UAW itself. For these reasons, we can assume that the reported number is far lower than actual instances. Still, this provides evidence that there were other instances where grievances were neglected by a Local.

Despite these difficulties, many Black individuals in the period before the 1960s, felt their workplaces were more egalitarian than public life at a time when they were not welcome in the dining areas of most Windsor restaurants and bars or to buy houses outside of designated areas of the city.¹⁰⁸ Black workers often joined unions in hope that labour organizations would also help take on civil rights issues, that they could help influence systemic issues outside the workplace as well as on the factory floor.¹⁰⁹ In Windsor, Local 444 often participated in community projects that were “directed at attacking racism,” but not in efforts to eliminate it from the plants.¹¹⁰ While the UAW officially supported the mainstream Civil Rights movement, they did little to actually push for anti-racist initiatives to support Black workers.¹¹¹ The labour movement has generally limited its influence to the workplace rather than mobilizing the collective power of the unions to advocate for wider social and political change.¹¹² The UAW’s discussions of race either spoke of it as a moral issue or as a macro socio-economic

¹⁰⁸ Sugiman, “Privilege and Oppression”, 105; Talbot, “Distinctive Character of Racism in Canada.”

¹⁰⁹ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 42.

¹¹⁰ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 67.

¹¹¹ Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, Cal Winslow, eds. *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt During the Long 1970s*, (London: Verso, 2010), 312.

¹¹² Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 372.

issue.¹¹³ While the union represents workers, it does so collectively and democratically, which can mean the unique needs of some of the more marginal or vulnerable members of the group can sometimes be ignored or dismissed as divisive.¹¹⁴ Black men experienced different struggles than their white counterparts in the workplace, and these differences were often neglected by unions.¹¹⁵

Civil rights activism by white workers was often associated with communism, meaning the Red Scare was an additional barrier to their participation as allies.¹¹⁶ The Red Scare caused a purge of “racially progressive whites and some of the most militant blacks” from unions and “put every black trade union activist at risk.”¹¹⁷ During this time the UAW International attacked groups like the National Negro Labour Council (1951-55) as being “communist inspired” and divisive to the struggles of the union.¹¹⁸ It had been communists within the American Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) who had pushed for “building the black-white unity that distinguished” the early work of the organization, and those efforts were demonized by Cold War anti-communist rhetoric.¹¹⁹ By the Seventies, labour activists were increasingly intersectionally minded in their advocacy.¹²⁰

While unions and employment legislation did help Black workers gain rights in the workplace, overall, they failed to engage with racism at the workplace level or

¹¹³ Sugiman, “Privilege and Oppression”, 87 & 100.

¹¹⁴ Oberemk, “Autoworkers,” 98.

¹¹⁵ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 66.

¹¹⁶ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 174.

¹¹⁷ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 181-2.

¹¹⁸ Foner, *Organized Labor*, 296 & 311.

¹¹⁹ Foner, *Organized Labor*, 292.

¹²⁰ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 4.

address concerning aspects of plant culture. New Black community leaders like Malcolm X were rising in popularity, and they generally considered trade-union leaders to be “unreliable allies” in the struggle against racism.¹²¹ Black union members who rose through the ranks often found themselves isolated from other members of the union executive, ostracized by actions like refusals to share a lunch table.¹²² It was a regular occurrence for motions that had been put forward by Black members to be ignored or dismissed at union meetings.¹²³ If it arose at all, white support of Black workers was “tempered by timidity” and silence as white allies were confronted with poor treatment by their peers.¹²⁴ The collective powers of unionized workers could be mobilized against those seen as Other by the majority-white labour force. When Black workers were finally hired at Chrysler, white men and women went on “hate strikes” to protest the hirings as they happened.¹²⁵ It was common practice for white workers to strike against improvements for conditions for Black workers across North America, the power of the union was used to support anti-Blackness.¹²⁶

Despite these struggles with racism in unions, if Black workers could unionize, they experienced huge gains in terms of wages and benefits, especially when compared to farm labour.¹²⁷ When interviewed by Helling, seventy-two percent of Black union workers in Windsor had a positive view of the unions.¹²⁸ While more Black workers may have been hired at the plant over time, like at other plants, there was no comparable

¹²¹ Foner, *Organized Labor*, 356.

¹²² Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 159-60.

¹²³ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 159-60.

¹²⁴ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 174.

¹²⁵ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 7.

¹²⁶ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 53.

¹²⁷ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 4.

¹²⁸ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 89.

increase in representation at the union level for Black workers.¹²⁹ At the very least Black union members had more money to invest in their own families and communities and were able to push for equality through involvement in civil rights organizations.¹³⁰

Violence had always been a feature of Windsor's labour culture, and physical confrontations were commonplace in every setting imaginable. Labour rights were often won through arduous and violent struggles against the company, and interpersonal violence was commonly used to settle disagreements at all levels of the workplace hierarchy. Through the 1950s, 60s and 70s, there were clashes between the Local and the Company.¹³¹ Violence had been increasing at the Chrysler plant through the 1970s, both in terms of injuries on the line and disputes between workers.¹³² There was an "awareness of violence" as "a part of plant culture" at Windsor Chrysler.¹³³ Fights were widely accepted in the "hypermasculine environment" of the factory where they were used to "resolve interpersonal disputes" and "enforce acceptable standards of behaviour" on the floor without management being involved.¹³⁴ There was an expectation of "hardness," both in the environment which forms the identity and through an internalization of this ideal by repressing emotional expressions outside of aggression.¹³⁵ Brooks himself found "the vicious atmosphere of the era was the foundation of a combative class consciousness and his union's leftist orientation" was the "basis for shop floor action as much as for wider political strategy deployed in part to defend working-class manhood," rooted in the

¹²⁹ Foner, *Organized Labor*, 397-8.

¹³⁰ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 240.

¹³¹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 67.

¹³² Sean Antaya, "The New Left at Work: Workers' Unity, the New Tendency, and Rank-and-File Organizing in Windsor, Ontario, in the 1970s," *Labour / Le Travail* 85, no. 85 (2020), 79.

¹³³ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 77.

¹³⁴ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75.

¹³⁵ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 120.

Depression-Era when workers had to fight for positions on the factory floor and then into a union.¹³⁶

Most considered the “code of violence at Windsor Chrysler” to be “complex and sometimes contradictory,” making it difficult to navigate as a newcomer or marginalized outsider.¹³⁷ This violence was often considered “self-contained” and unlikely to spill into public. It was deemed interpersonal in nature and a reasonable way of settling disputes.¹³⁸ Contained violence is often dismissed by the criminal justice system as not being a matter of public concern. There were valid or sanctioned forms of violence which were normalized as part of the plant culture. Barroom brawls were common amongst workers on their off time, with alcohol fuelling conflicts that had begun on the line. A newsletter for the Local even warned members to not engage with supervisors “when encountering [them] in the tavern.”¹³⁹ Workers were not afraid to negotiate with their workplace superiors through direct action.

The nature of industrial factory labour run with scientific management techniques is that essentially dehumanizes the worker and uses them as a machine and not a creator.¹⁴⁰ This dehumanization meant that people were pushed past their human limits in the name of increasing productivity. Pushing people to work like machines and not allowing them their humanity is another form of workplace violence. The violence the company subjects its workers to can also be seen when workers are pushed to their physical limits by the company, either by speedups or by forcing individuals to end sick

¹³⁶ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 64-5.

¹³⁷ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 76.

¹³⁸ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 78.

¹³⁹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 80

¹⁴⁰ Oberemk, “Autoworkers,” 8.

leaves and other breaks early. There is an inherent violence subjected onto the worker by the control the company has over the ability for their employees to care for their families and survive the capitalist system.

In an attempt to increase the number of available workers in the labour force, the government made a change in regulations in 1967, resulting in an estimated tripling of the number of immigrants moving to Canada.¹⁴¹ Reported incidence of physically violent racism were relatively rare in Windsor, but that rates had been increasing through the Seventies, especially attacks on Asian-Canadians due to rising anti-Japanese sentiment.¹⁴² Through the 1970s there was a significant increase in the Black population in the Windsor area, mainly from Caribbean nations of the Commonwealth.¹⁴³ However, this did not extend to all immigrants equally, as the number of people admitted from Africa and the West Indies remained consistently low throughout the decade after the policy changes that saw dramatic increases in immigration from Asian countries.¹⁴⁴ This increase in the minority population meant that white Canadians were forced to put their ‘colour-blind’ reputation to the test far more frequently than they had for much of Canadian history. In many Canadian cities the mid-Seventies saw a rise in violence against Black individuals and other racialized people, including an increase in actions by white supremacist groups.¹⁴⁵ It is likely that the real number of harassment cases was much

¹⁴¹ Paula Denise McClain, *Alienation and Resistance: The Political Behavior of Afro-Canadians*, (Palo Alto, Calif: R&E Research Associates, 1979), 19.

¹⁴² Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 150-6.

¹⁴³ There was no racial designation category on Canadian censuses until 1996, so tracking the demographics can be a challenge and numbers may vary. (Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 60). The Essex County Black population was just under one per cent of the population in 1961, with 2402 individuals (Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 6). By 1982, the Black population in Windsor numbered about seven thousand people (Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 36).

¹⁴⁴ McClain, *Alienation and Resistance*, 19-21.

¹⁴⁵ McClain, *Alienation and Resistance*, 23 & 27-30.

higher than the actual reported number. Black Canadians may have been hesitant to report such crimes to police when about one quarter of Black Windsorites had experienced harassment or unfair treatment by the police.¹⁴⁶ Racial violence in Windsor was rooted in “economic and social problems” which could result in increasing potential for racial conflict if unemployment continued to rise and the economy continued to decline.¹⁴⁷ The situation was difficult for racialized Canadians, and there were predictions that things would only get worse as the economy worsened. Many of the Black Windsorites surveyed for the Chacko Report thought that they had been treated differently than white Windsorites by police in the city.¹⁴⁸ If individuals do not trust the police to treat them well, then they are less likely to reach out to the police for assistance, and therefore may not be recorded in official crime statistics. When the Black population of Canada increased, so too did incidences of violence and systemic oppression as racism became more formalized and entrenched.¹⁴⁹

It is interesting that Talbot was considered to be notably violent by his mostly white peers given that violence was a core aspect of industrial masculinity, particularly in the 1970s. There is a long history of Black men in Canada being stereotyped as more dangerous or violent than their white peers. It is possible the idea of him being a bully at all was rooted in racist conceptions of Black men being a threat more than white men. In the 1903 Sandwich, Ontario court case *R. v. Richardson* the defence attempted to justify the shooting of a Black man by his white neighbour claiming he was inherently stronger

¹⁴⁶ Helling, *Position of Negroes, Chinese and Italians*, 72.

¹⁴⁷ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 157.

¹⁴⁸ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 168.

¹⁴⁹ Johnson, et al., eds., *Unsettling*, 197.

and therefore a greater threat.¹⁵⁰ This commonly held racist myth would likely have factored into many white people's understandings of the Talbot case, and into his co-workers' view of him. Among his coworkers, Talbot had a reputation as a "bully in the plant" who was not afraid to use his reputation as a boxer to pressure them to finish their breaks early.¹⁵¹ This threat seemed to have lost some of its edge after another worker took up his challenge and beat him in the ensuing fight.¹⁵² Talbot was forced to give up fighting after an incident where he was shot by a man four times during a dispute in a bar parking lot after Talbot assumed a fighting stance against him in 1972.¹⁵³ Again from the *R. v. Richardson* trial, men at the courthouse called the white neighbour "the biggest n****r of the two" for his reputation as a bully made him "unworthy of being categorized as white."¹⁵⁴ This shows a pattern of racialization which would essentially affect a Black man with a 'bully' reputation twice, once for his race and again for his actions. A new identity rose to prominence in Seventies popular culture, "a *ghost* of Black Power masculinity" arose that emphasized toughness and strength without directing those energies against systemic oppression, in a fetishization of a radical political identity.¹⁵⁵

Black workers often experienced trauma through harassment by their white co-workers.¹⁵⁶ Techniques of resistance to racial violence in the workplace varied from carrying a weapon on their person, to person-to-person campaigning to gain allies.¹⁵⁷ One

¹⁵⁰ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 188.

¹⁵¹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75.

¹⁵² Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75-6.

¹⁵³ Lloyd McLachlan, "Remains of a Dream," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jun. 11, 1994. Alan Henderson, "Talbot's fate in hands of jury," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON). Dec. 16, 1977.

¹⁵⁴ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 175.

¹⁵⁵ *Censoring mine. Emphasis authors. Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 60-2.

¹⁵⁶ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 50-4 & 128 & 148.

of Honey's informants, Clarence Coe, explained his method of dealing with racism, "if anyone ever called me n****r personally on the job, that was it. I would fight... maybe that's why I took early retirement. It kept the pressure on you."¹⁵⁸ Another Honey informant spoke of the tendency for Black workers to carry a switchblade in the Forties to defend themselves against harassment.¹⁵⁹ Many workers carried weapons either on their person or in their vehicle, and they became more commonly seen on picket-lines to defend Wildcatters.¹⁶⁰ With his propensity to fight, we might assume Talbot's method of dealing with racism may have been similar to Coe's, and that he also felt under pressure from the constant threats and need to defend himself. Shot during altercations on two separate occasions in the late Sixties, Talbot felt vulnerable and began carrying a hunting rifle in his car.¹⁶¹ The gun's presence that day does not necessarily indicate a prolonged premeditation of his actions.

CHAPTER 4 - BROOKS' UNION

Affectionately known to all as Charlie, Charles Ernest Brooks was born in 1915 in the same downtown Windsor neighbourhood Clarence Talbot would grow up in a generation later. The eldest child of a family of six during the Great Depression of the 1930's, he started working around the age of ten in order to supplement the government welfare his family received.¹⁶² Hired in 1937, the first year Brooks worked at Chrysler was the same year Chrysler and GM employees won their first contract using work-

¹⁵⁸ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 74.

¹⁵⁹ Honey, *Black Workers Remember*, 128.

¹⁶⁰ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 317.

¹⁶¹ Injuries from these shootings also resulted in Talbot being unable to box, a key outlet for him that is discussed further below. Alan Henderson, "Psychiatrist's testimony heard at Talbot's trial," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 14, 1977.

¹⁶² Tom McMahon, "A man at the top... roots at the bottom," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.

stoppages like sit-downs to capture management's attention.¹⁶³ Brooks got his first permanent job at Chrysler after the outbreak of World War Two brought with it an industrial labour shortage.¹⁶⁴ Brooks had an intimate understanding of the factory and its workers and was instrumental to the founding of UAW Local 444 in 1956 after successfully separating from the more conservative Local 195.¹⁶⁵ The 1940-to-mid-1970s saw both the "golden age for trade unionists" and the "age of high Fordism."¹⁶⁶ There seemed to be endless potential for growth in consumer demands and high levels of employment with good wages for workers, but a "domestication" of the working class hit extremes.¹⁶⁷ In the City of Windsor, the UAW Local 444 was a powerful entity. Estimates say up to one quarter of the people in the city have a connection to the Union when considering retirees and dependents of workers.¹⁶⁸

A respected member of the Windsor community, Brooks was involved in the promotion of many social programs which earned him recognition like the 1975 United Community Services "Man of the Year" award.¹⁶⁹ Known as a UAW leader who was "cut from a very different cloth," Brooks was a vocal opponent of the status quo and "a maverick by nature" who was "admired by some and hated by many" with a strong base of supporters in the Local that he could consistently mobilize when needed.¹⁷⁰ Having built his career during the 'Golden Age' of unions, Brooks was unafraid to join the rank-

¹⁶³ McMahon, "A man at the top..."

¹⁶⁴ McMahon, "A man at the top..."

¹⁶⁵ Canadian Press, "UAW official shot to death in Windsor union hall," *Brantford Expositor* (Brantford, ON), Jan 18, 1977.

¹⁶⁶ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 268-9 & 271

¹⁶⁷ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 341.

¹⁶⁸ Alan Henderson, "Talbot trial moved to Toronto," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Sep. 7, 1977.

¹⁶⁹ Canadian Press, "UAW official shot to death."

¹⁷⁰ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 90.

and-file on the picket line during wildcat strikes.¹⁷¹ Brooks was known as an “underdog” who worked his way up and fought to bring up as many people with him as he could.¹⁷² He pushed for social unionism from the time he became the head of the Local.¹⁷³ A known communist, Brooks’ leadership resulted in many gains for leftist pursuits.¹⁷⁴ His associations with the CPC would later be used against him as Walter Reuther purged opposition to his leadership and anyone with ties to communism.¹⁷⁵ Despite his struggles with the politics of the International, Brooks was elected president of the Local 444 eleven times and onto the UAW international’s national negotiating committee three times.¹⁷⁶

Union de-militarization in the 1940s and 50s led to a growing sentiment that unions could not handle the complaints of workers in the wake of the economic destabilization of the Post-War period.¹⁷⁷ The UAW International wanted to focus on stabilizing “labour-management relations,” making them more bureaucratic and regulated instead of agitating for radical changes to industrial labour systems.¹⁷⁸ This process was categorized as “Responsible versus Militant Unionism” which by default made the determination that militant unionism was irresponsible to pursue.¹⁷⁹ The bureaucratic structure of the union placed union executives and stewards between workers and the company. Agitators believed that increasing formalization of employer/worker relations

¹⁷¹ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 150.

¹⁷² McMahan, “A man at the top...”

¹⁷³ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 58.

¹⁷⁴ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 76.90

¹⁷⁵ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 70.

¹⁷⁶ McMahan, “A man at the top....”

¹⁷⁷ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 93.

¹⁷⁸ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 76.

¹⁷⁹ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 78.

had bred complacency in the industrial unions.¹⁸⁰ This was true in many unions. By the 1950s the majority had shifted to a “legalistic, business form” rather than being about mass-mobilization of workers.¹⁸¹ There was a perception that the union had eroded its own power by aligning itself with management rather than with the workforce.¹⁸² Bureaucratization further isolated the union from the workers who they represented.¹⁸³ There was a de-democratization of unions as rank-and-file workers were excluded from decision-making processes in the name of streamlining negotiations with the company.¹⁸⁴ There was a growing reluctance by unions to challenge the company’s “Right to Manage” their employees in order to ensure success of the company, including the scheduling, hiring and firing of workers.¹⁸⁵

The Sixties and Seventies saw massive shifts in the economy, bringing with it a reconstruction of the working class.¹⁸⁶ The ‘Baby Boomers’ began to enter the job market and up to thirty percent of the workforce were youth aged under thirty by the late 1960s.¹⁸⁷ Conflict between young members and union leaders of the previous generations began to the rise.¹⁸⁸ In many unions the founding members were retiring and being replaced by newcomers who had raised through the ranks when bureaucracy was the *mode de jour* over radical direct action.¹⁸⁹ Many of these newcomers had experience in youth or student movements of the Sixties and Seventies, and some sought jobs in the

¹⁸⁰ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 283 & 314.

¹⁸¹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 284.

¹⁸² Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 43-4.

¹⁸³ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 113.

¹⁸⁴ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 108-9.

¹⁸⁵ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 285; CNESST, “Right to Manage”, CNESST, January 18, 2023. <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/en/prevention-and-safety/healthy-workplace/right-manage>

¹⁸⁶ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 87.

¹⁸⁷ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 284; Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 313-314.

¹⁸⁸ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 315-317.

¹⁸⁹ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 133.

field as part of a strategy to mobilize workers.¹⁹⁰ The rank-and-file insurgents in Windsor were part of a larger trend across the US and Canada that pushed for radical changes to union structures and leadership.¹⁹¹ These newcomers saw the union executive board as another system seeking to control workers.

The “Great Recession” of the mid Seventies hit manufacturing sectors particularly hard, with a forty percent fall in US manufacturing profits between 1965 and 1973 and signaling the end of the Post-War economic boom.¹⁹² The decline of the Keynesian/Fordist economic system began in 1975 when the industries that had ruled the economy for over a century responded to the recession with layoffs. Inflation drastically reduced demand for consumer goods and natural resources the Canadian economy relied heavily upon.¹⁹³ Palmer characterizes the period 1975-90 as “a time of permanent crisis” in Canadian labour which allows us insight into the pressures that rank-and-file union members were experiencing through these changes.¹⁹⁴ The economy turned toward more white- and pink-collar jobs to replace loses in blue-collar sectors.¹⁹⁵ The State became increasingly interventionist in labour, not always to the benefit of workers—the Anti-Inflation Board put in place by the federal government from 1975-1978 saw workers’ wages sacrificed to pay down Canada’s increasing debts*; breaking up wildcat strikes as workers attempted to battle inflation and wage suppression.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁰ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 54-5.

¹⁹¹ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 33.

¹⁹² Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File* 62 & 70 & 77.

¹⁹³ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 323 & 338 & 342-3.

¹⁹⁴ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 405.

¹⁹⁵ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 85-6.

¹⁹⁶ *Wages decreased over 7% during the AIB’s existence. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 344-7.

The North American *Rust Belt* developed as deindustrialization swept through cities and towns from Quebec through the Midwest, from 1969 until 1984.¹⁹⁷ Towns and cities had grown around factories and were economically shaped by the booms and busts of the industrial cycle as workers and those who supported their labour made up the bulk of their population.¹⁹⁸ Windsor was in this range, though its economy was slightly more diversified than most.¹⁹⁹ The years between 1965 and 1973 were a time of crisis in the industrial sector, with conditions for workers deteriorating rapidly when compared to the gains of the Post-War period.²⁰⁰ Workers feared plant shut-downs would come from technological shifts and increasing globalization of the economy, generating massive strike waves of the late-Sixties and early-Seventies.²⁰¹ There was a loss of prestige and a growing sense of embarrassment at being a blue-collar industrial worker in the midst of deindustrialization which affected many workers like Talbot.²⁰² When people lose their job, they also lose a part of their identity as a worker. When people lose jobs *en masse* it amounts to a form of class violence. Where there is deindustrialization and destructions of neighbourhoods that once fed factories, there is a mourning for the loss of lifeway, often accompanied by a sense of anger or betrayal.²⁰³ Nearly every industrial worker interviewed for projects directed by High often expressed their feelings about losing their jobs “in terms of anger, bitterness, and sadness” and were directed at all manner of targets besides the company, including the union.²⁰⁴ The process of losing a job is

¹⁹⁷ High, *Industrial Sunset*, 4-6

¹⁹⁸ High, *Industrial Sunset*, 4-5.

¹⁹⁹ High, *Industrial Sunset*, 4-5.

²⁰⁰ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 37-8.

²⁰¹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 272-3.

²⁰² High, *Industrial Sunset*, 80.

²⁰³ High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’,” 111.

²⁰⁴ High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’,” 104.

considered to be humiliating, no matter the cause, partially citing Kathryn Marie Dudley, High calls plant closings “a status-degradation ritual” which forces blue-collar labourers to recognize their “lower social status” after “pretending to be” more well off through their engagement with capitalist labour.²⁰⁵ Losing a job means a loss of personal and family security, when it happens en masse, it becomes a neighbourhood crisis.²⁰⁶

The “Long Seventies” saw an increase of rank-and-file labour militancy to levels unseen since the 1930s, almost entirely driven from the bottom up through direct action.²⁰⁷ The economic struggles of this period triggered a “Wildcat Wave,” where confrontations between workers and “all levels of constraining authority (employer, state, and bureaucratized union),” colloquially the “three enemies,” became increasingly violent and frequent.²⁰⁸ Wildcat strikers could generally expect little support from the Union, who often saw militant groups as disruptive to the process of negotiating with the company.²⁰⁹ Strikes were not just an opportunity to capture the attention of the company and the public, they were also important times for education and solidarity building among workers which increased the likelihood of future actions and made it harder to take advantage of workers.²¹⁰ Strikes happened frequently in this period with “one-quarter of the industrial disputes recorded after 1900 erupted between 1971 and 1975.”²¹¹ By 1971 there were 68 incidences of sabotage, 37 walkouts, and 18 sit-downs at Windsor Chrysler.²¹² In 1975, half of all union members in Canada had walked a picket line to try

²⁰⁵ High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’,” 102.

²⁰⁶ High, “The ‘Normalized Quiet of Unseen Power’ 107.

²⁰⁷ Brenner, Aaron, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, xii-xiii.

²⁰⁸ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 316.

²⁰⁹ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 302-3.

²¹⁰ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 8.

²¹¹ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 94.

²¹² Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75.

to address worker concerns about their treatment in the workplace.²¹³ Companies became increasingly confident in forcing unions into concessionary agreements after the militant highs of the mid-Seventies faded.²¹⁴

Through the 1960s, workers became increasingly comfortable with the grievance process and/or conditions deteriorated so that the number of grievances filed drastically increased. Workers who felt isolated from the union and its processes began to demand reforms to create a more transparent and democratic system for decision making and grievance procedures.²¹⁵ At General Motors, US and Canada, the number of written grievances per one hundred workers went from thirty-four (106,000 filed) to sixty (256,000 filed).²¹⁶ The union was “legally compelled to quell most workplace disruptions” for the life of the collective agreement contract.²¹⁷ One of the biggest concerns for rank-and-file insurgents was the handling of grievances by the union, including “delays and setbacks” caused by “‘open-ended’ grievance procedures” that lacked transparency in their processes.²¹⁸ It was common for workers to believe that the union was not following up on their grievances, but it would have been difficult for the individual to prove at the time. The union held the power to withdraw its support for a worker if its representatives sided with the Company over the worker, leaving the worker “open prey” to the actions of the management.²¹⁹ Without union support, Talbot was unable to fight for his job back.

²¹³ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 407.

²¹⁴ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 347.

²¹⁵ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 359.

²¹⁶ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 286.

²¹⁷ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 59.

²¹⁸ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 385-6.

²¹⁹ Oberemk, “Autoworkers,” 19 & 68.

There was a grassroots push by rank-and file workers to advocate against unsafe working conditions through unsanctioned strike action.²²⁰ Prior to this period, it was uncommon for unions to confront unsafe working conditions, which were usually considered an unavoidable part of the dangerous world of labour. They were also willing to fight for the opportunity to find dignity in their work and to be respected by the company in addition to tradition labour goals.²²¹ There was an outbreak of radical groups within the rank-and-file who organized and distributed criticisms to push for changes to the union's structure.²²² Worker deaths on the line, blamed on speed-ups, only intensified workers' feelings that the Union was not doing enough to fight back against the demands of the company.²²³ The UAW largely refused to challenge speed-ups and other issues that fell under the umbrella of "management rights," which were enshrined in collective agreements.²²⁴ Palmer argues that the union leaders were so removed from their fellow workers that they "bought deeply into the notion of workers as property," and negotiated with the company over control of workers lives.²²⁵ Leftist members of the union within the Chrysler plant agitated and organized among the rank and file, criticizing Brooks and the other executive members as being ineffective at advocating for the needs of workers against the company.

Two of the major groups to arise in Windsor factories were the grassroots Workers' Unity (WU); and the Auto Worker Group (AWG), an offshoot of an

²²⁰ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 150.

²²¹ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 32.

²²² Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 88.

²²³ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 79.

²²⁴ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 143.

²²⁵ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 371.

autonomous Canadian Marxists' organization called The New Tendency (TNT).²²⁶ Many workers felt the union had acted against the interests of workers in the early 1970s, and that it had become too bureaucratic and therefore ineffective in its advocacy.²²⁷ Worker's Unity (WU) attracted support in the Chrysler plant and inspired such enthusiasm in activist circles that some people moved to Windsor specifically to join and support the movement.²²⁸ These worker-activists were coping with feelings of "alienation, resentment, and class tension" and wanted to pursue new models of labour relations.²²⁹ WU's position was firmly anti-Brooks, frequently criticizing him as well as the union and the company in leaflets.²³⁰ To them, union existed not just to advocate on the workers' behalf, but to keep the rank-and-file on the line and at work for the company. They called for changes to the union structure, including the development of a "worker's council" to represent the rank-and-file to the executive board.²³¹ They critiqued the union structure in their newsletter, declaring that "progressive stewards are no more useful than 'good' cops," and even the best-intentioned steward is part of an oppressive system.²³² While it may be argued that there were merely 'Bad Apples' among the many good, hardworking union leaders, the issue was "not which union leader is enlightened and sophisticated but what union leadership does as a structured feature of the workers' movement."²³³ Rebel rank-and-file members considered one of their greatest struggles to not be against the company itself, but against an increasingly bureaucratic "business unionism" which was

²²⁶ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 55-6, 58.

²²⁷ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 80.

²²⁸ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 60-61.

²²⁹ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 316.

²³⁰ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 60.

²³¹ Worker's Unity, "Anatomy," 6-7.

²³² Worker's Unity, "Anatomy," 11.

²³³ Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 372.

driven to settle with the company with “concessionary bargaining” rather than agitating for radical improvements of working conditions for workers.²³⁴ One core member of WU felt Brooks “wanted to get rid of” members of the groups and that he failed to advocate for that member and three others when they had been fired with a grievance. As a result, one of that party had to reach out to UAW International for assistance against the Local.²³⁵ Whether it was a result of an overwhelmed executive branch or intentional sabotage, it is understandable why this would register poorly for Brook’s reputation among the workers. Many members believed that unions bowed to pressure from companies to insulate management from worker’s concerns. The tension between the Local 444 executive board and rank-and file members resulted in the formation of several rank-and-file organizations through the Seventies.

Critics of Brooks were extremely vocal and challenged the status quo that had been established in the Post-War period. While his record shows a man unafraid of radical opinions and making big changes, some critics believed Brooks’ record had become slightly more moderate over the years.²³⁶ He showed this to be untrue in his final address to the rank-and-file in the union newsletter, where he called the membership to action and declared a need to return to nationally coordinating the unions and to mobilize workers for radical change.²³⁷ The message ended with Brooks wishing “a prosperous and militant New Year” to the workers and their families.²³⁸ Brooks was one of the few

²³⁴ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, xv & 5.

²³⁵ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 67.

²³⁶ “A radical is a guy who believes in change and has the brains to achieve it.”- Brooks. McMahon, “A man at the top...”

²³⁷ Charles Brooks, “Charlie’s Last message to his men,” Reprinted in *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.

²³⁸ Brooks, “Charlie’s Last message to his men.”

UAW leaders to encourage a dialogue with the rank-and-file about changes, helping to organize a symposium on the topic in 1972 where he advocated for direct labour action rather than lobbying or campaigning to politicians.²³⁹ The well-established Brooks was seen as “increasingly detached” and associated with a “repressive labour bureaucracy” by these new radical workers.²⁴⁰ While he is remembered as a radical leader, in the later years of his career Brooks was the target of great animosity from disgruntled workers who felt that he had not worked hard enough to push their grievances after they were fired from Chrysler. In Brooks’ later years corruption rumours involving the UAW’s involvement in a housing co-operative began to circulate.²⁴¹ These uncorroborated claims seemed to have failed to push Brooks from favour among the majority of workers and Windsorites. If Brooks was engaged in some form of corruption, it would not have been unusual in a time and place where union corruption was commonplace: the infamous Jimmy Hoffa was headquartered right across the river in Detroit.²⁴² At the very least critics felt that the union leadership was “playing it safe” in its dealings with the company.²⁴³

By 1972 WU had dissolved, replaced by a group that was developed by several activists who met through established Leftist organizations in the city, cycling through many names and members before eventually becoming Windsor Auto Worker Group (AWG).²⁴⁴ They also advocated for the creation of working group councils that could

²³⁹ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 153.

²⁴⁰ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 59.

²⁴¹ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 84.

²⁴² Growing up there was even a rumour that Hoffa had been buried in foundations of the Ambassador Bridge which connects Windsor and Detroit, just one of a near infinite number of suggested locations for his resting place.

²⁴³ Worker’s Unity, “Anatomy,” 10.

²⁴⁴ Antaya, “The New Left at Work,” 73-77.

advise the executive board of the union.²⁴⁵ Brooks attempted to reach out to AWG, but his offers to endorse their newsletter and assist with printing was ultimately rejected.²⁴⁶ He was in a minority of UAW leaders who reached out to rank-and-file organizers. Other leaders like Walter Reuther of the UAW International were publicly opposed to cooperating with the insurgent groups, going so far as to label them terrorists.²⁴⁷ When [an unpopular] union official had been fired, workers had been encouraged to walk-out and had subsequently been collectively punished by the company, similar support was not given to relief workers who had been fired after engaging in direct action.²⁴⁸ It is possible that Talbot may have been involved in such actions or had at least heard of them and been militarized by such events, just as other workers were.

CHAPTER 5 - SYSTEMS

Talbot was initially charged with first degree murder, which is usually reserved for the slaying of on duty Police Officers or prison guards in the Canadian justice system.²⁴⁹ This speaks to both the shock of the community at the labour leader's death, and the way the justice system treats Black individuals with a heavier hand than other defendants. Black defendants with white victims were almost always treated "particularly harshly" by the justice system. Crimes across the "colour line" were usually considered particularly egregious.²⁵⁰ By killing a white man in a position of authority whose role was essentially white-collar, Talbot crossed a "colour line" and a "class line" when he killed Brooks. The charge was later dropped to second-degree murder because there was

²⁴⁵ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 77.

²⁴⁶ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 79.

²⁴⁷ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 293.

²⁴⁸ Antaya, "The New Left at Work," 80.

²⁴⁹ Brown, "Murder Suspect Faces Life."

²⁵⁰ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 170.

no evidence that the shooting was planned in advance nor was Brooks a law enforcement officer or penal employee.²⁵¹ Both first- and second-degree murder have mandatory life sentences. However, there is a fifteen-year difference in parole eligibility between the two.²⁵² A charge of possessing a restricted weapon was added later when the preliminary court hearing took place June 13, 1977.²⁵³ An investigation of the legal handling of this case and others like it allows us to gain insight into the relationships between concepts of race, mental health, and criminality.

Like the British-controlled system before it, the justice system in Canada boasted its “racelessness” and its superiority to the American system. However the nature of a jury trial meant that the racial biases of the people in the area infiltrated any case that was tried creating racial disparities regardless of the intention of the law.²⁵⁴ A ‘colour-blind’ system can obscure systemic issues by failing to track for variables that would allow systems to be evaluated, for example the failure to document the race of most clients in the justice system.²⁵⁵ The Canadian legal system played a cultural role in the “establishment and enforcement of [the] racial hierarchy” that was built systemically into the society as part of a network meant to maintain the power of the metropole by instilling colonial values on individuals and institutions.²⁵⁶ The social history of Black Canadians is therefore intertwined with the country’s legal history as a consequence of

²⁵¹ Alan Henderson, “Talbot charge reduced to second-degree murder,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 15, 1977.

²⁵² Henderson, “Talbot charge reduced to second-degree murder.”

²⁵³ *Star Staff Reporters*, “Talbot’s preliminary court hearing,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jun. 13, 1977.

²⁵⁴ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 189-190.

²⁵⁵ Barrington Walker, *Race on Trial: Black Defendants in Ontario’s Criminal Courts, 1858-1958*, (Toronto: Published for The Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History by University of Toronto Press, 2010), 13.

²⁵⁶ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 10-12.

the colonial nature of the Canadian state.²⁵⁷ When Black individuals are on trial, the concept of “Blackness” is also being brought on trial, with biases being challenged or validated but always discussed.²⁵⁸ It is never just about the actions of the client. The right to kill remained in control of the state within a democracy. That can include deciding whose deaths are ‘acceptable’ and which killers face punishment and how.²⁵⁹ The state maintained control over the lives of those accused of madness and criminality, often using race (or other imagined boundaries like gender) as a tool in determining who is identified as mad or criminal.

When people lash out at repression, they may not strike directly at the oppressor, but at the closest target that can stand in for that authority. When replacements were brought onto the line in Windsor to replace workers refusing to work overtime two days before Christmas in 1966, a brawl broke out between the sets of workers, with the foremen joining the replacements in the fight.²⁶⁰ These workers did not assemble and attack the company offices. They turned on their fellow workers who were also being exploited. When people lash out at authority, they often do not also strike directly at that authority, but at the closest target that can stand in for that authority. Though “workers occasionally assaulted supervisors in the plants as well” and “violence was the ultimate resource” workers had to use against their superiors in the Company.²⁶¹ If violence in the workplace is often unleashed on those who are nearest to the slighted, perhaps Brooks was merely the most accessible victim through which Talbot could target his frustrations.

²⁵⁷ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 3.

²⁵⁸ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 20.

²⁵⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 77-8.

²⁶⁰ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2017), 70.

²⁶¹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 81 & 85.

The Union offices where the Brooks died were a space where rank-and-file membership are free to access in a way the company representatives' spaces are not. If Talbot was simply attacking in a reactive way, he had plenty of opportunity to claim more victims. Instead, he asked them to move out of the way, focusing on Brooks alone.

Brooks' funeral received detailed coverage by the *Windsor Star*. The auto industry in Windsor was essentially shut down the day of Brooks' funeral as mourners attended a service at Turner Road union hall where he had died and said goodbye to a beloved friend, co-worker, and leader.²⁶² As many as 8000 people were reported to have filed by Brooks to say goodbye. Approximately 1500 individuals came to the funeral service, and around 200 attended the gravesite at Windsor Grove at Howard Avenue and Ellis Street.²⁶³ Due to the traffic associated with the procession, area schools had to change their lunch break time so that children would not be walking home in the midst of the procession.²⁶⁴ The headlines immediately following the shooting tend to be written sympathetically or with some air of mourning, though there are some exceptions. The *North Bay Nugget* from Ontario was notably sordid with its headline "Union head dies in hail of bullets" calling to mind crime comics, gangster movies and Teamster-style violence.²⁶⁵ When interviewed by the press immediately after the shooting, Canadian director of the UAW Dennis MacDermott, who was based in Toronto and not on the scene claimed that he "did not believe union politics were involved" in the shooting.²⁶⁶ This response may have been directed at those who had made a connection between the

²⁶² *Star Staff Reporters*, "Ranks join in farewell to Charlie," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan 20, 1977.

²⁶³ Michael Frezell, "And one became national news," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 30, 1977.

²⁶⁴ *Star Staff Reporters*, "Ranks join in farewell."

²⁶⁵ Canadian Press, "Union head dies in hail of bullets," *North Bay Nugget* (North Bay, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.

²⁶⁶ Canadian Press, "Suspect arrested: Windsor UAW Leader Shot," *Ottawa Citizen* (Ottawa, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.

upheaval due to rebel groups within the union and the violent event in an attempt to quell rumours that may arise. It indicates that the upheaval in the unions was something that the *Star* and therefore the public was aware of at the time of the shooting.

On September 6, 1977, the court convened in an unusual spot, CBET TV Windsor's television studio. For the first time ever, an Ontario Supreme Court case would be argued from a news station's studio.²⁶⁷ Talbot's lawyer argued Talbot could not possibly get a fair trial in Windsor because of the saturation and bias of the media and so CBET and sister station WJBK, Detroit, were ordered to show the judge all of their footage related to the case.²⁶⁸ Newspaper articles from the *Windsor Star*, fifty-seven in total, were also examined in this process which was considered an open court.²⁶⁹ This process put the media on trial as a participatory member in the trial process, directly affecting the court's ability to select a jury from the city of Windsor. The significant access granted to reporters and the news coverage it produced meant that Windsorites as a whole were intimately familiar with the case and therefore biased.²⁷⁰ News sources in the city persisted in publishing information about the trial, even with a publication ban in place in open disregard for the justice system's processes.²⁷¹ The actions and events of Local 444 were always a subject closely followed by the *Windsor Star*, and Brooks' death was no exception. Reporters for the *Star* named a contact in the Windsor Police Force, Officer Inspector Jim Ure, as a source on the day of the shooting, indicating a

²⁶⁷ Alan Henderson, "Talbot case adjourns to screen news films," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Sep. 7, 1977.

²⁶⁸ Henderson, "Talbot case adjourns to screen news films."

²⁶⁹ Henderson, "Talbot case adjourns to screen news films."

²⁷⁰ Henderson, "Judge approves switch of Talbot trial to Toronto."

²⁷¹ Henderson, "Judge approves switch of Talbot trial to Toronto."

close relationship between the police and the media.²⁷² The media's close relationship with the legal system continued through the trial.

The Canadian press never mentioned that Talbot was a Black man in their coverage of the case. This is in contrast to the findings of the Chacko Report which just a few years later found that the media "tended to identify" people by their "racial origin when reporting illicit activity" which this incident surely is.²⁷³ While the report points to radio as the main culprits for this form of racism, the *Windsor Star* was also found to be guilty of this.²⁷⁴ Upon review of the *Star's* content at the time, one finds rare mentions of racism were always about cases in the United States or in provinces outside of Ontario. While the *Star* itself was rarely directly racist in its news coverage. However, they did report a KKK "chief" to be "an ordinary likeable young Canadian" when he was brought to Windsor by CKWW Radio in 1981.²⁷⁵ Where the *Windsor Star* discusses Talbot's entire family as violent and anti-social, while Brooks was labeled a "community icon."²⁷⁶ The press tended to prefer a guilty sentence as it can be presented to the public as a "just conclusions" and a point of resolution to the story of a crime.²⁷⁷ Reporters connected Brooks' death to an increase in murders in Windsor, with the numbers going from six in 1976 to eleven in the first ten months of 1977.²⁷⁸ This is the one mention of larger social issues when discussing the case. The *Windsor Star* reported that MacDermott believed

²⁷² Henderson, "Local 444's Charles Brooks slain; suspect arrested," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan 17, 1977.

²⁷³ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 159.

²⁷⁴ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 160-1.

²⁷⁵ Chacko, *Race Relations in Windsor*, 161.

²⁷⁶ Dave Battagello, "Talbot's family blood," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 24, 2012 (updated Apr. 3, 2020), accessed Feb. 3, 2023.

²⁷⁷ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 231.

²⁷⁸ Michael Frezell, "City murders averaged almost one a month," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 30, 1977.

the death was the result of “lethal anarchy” caused by a “neurotic society,” and that losing Brooks was “absolute insanity.”²⁷⁹ The language of madness was immediately present, that Talbot’s actions were caused by individual neurosis and insanity and not a reaction to system that caused him harm.

A 2012 *Windsor Star* article which sourced information from a retired Windsor Police inspector characterised the Talbot family as “different” and “always involved in conflict” and Clarence himself as “a very violent man” who had “a problem with civilization.”²⁸⁰ However, we know that members of Talbot’s family like his brother Clayton were respected members of their community and the UAW. The *Windsor Star*’s initial reports of the incident mention that Talbot was functionally illiterate and had dropped out of school in seventh grade, possibly to further ‘Other’ him.²⁸¹ This was at a time when many Black children were being encouraged by teacher or guidance counsellors to drop out and pursue a career in trades or industrial work.²⁸² The media created two highly stylized characters of Brooks and Talbot, simplification resulting in a dichotomization of these men into the Hero and the Villain in a way that echoes the archetypes of the sports world. The media tended to not discuss anti-Black racism and avoided mention of prejudice generally. In Canada, the only civil rights cases that gained widespread discussion or coverage tend to be related to the rights of French-speaking peoples, especially in Quebec. The right to speak French on the shop floor and for people

²⁷⁹ Canadian Press, “Man held after longtime union leader shot to death,” *Edmonton Journal* (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada), Jan 18, 1977. Canadian Press, “Ex-auto worker held in union chief’s death,” *Vancouver Sun* (Vancouver, BC), Jan. 18, 1977.

²⁸⁰ Battagello, “Talbot’s family blood.”

²⁸¹ Gord Henderson and Paul Patterson, “Clarence Talbot charged in Brooks’ death,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 18, 1977.; Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75.

²⁸² Talbot, “Distinctive Character,” 21.

in majority French-speaking plants to be accommodated by integrating Francophone management were key issues in Canadian labour and civil rights discussions.²⁸³

The Canadian media tended to use Talbot's filed boxing photo, which was distributed through media network sources like the *Canadian Press*.²⁸⁴ The use of this photo may have had more to do with the easy access these sources had to these photos, as they were on file from coverage of Talbot's boxing career.²⁸⁵ Interestingly, two days after the shooting, the *Detroit Free Press* chose to run a photo of a different picture of Talbot which informs us that other photos were likely available for the *Star* to choose.²⁸⁶

Heroism is cultivated in the sports realm to counteract racist stereotypes that traditionally cast Black men as the "evil other" where the "individual body of the athlete... is deployed as a 'hero'" in narratives that echo ideals of nationhood and therefore of belonging and citizenship.²⁸⁷ Conversely, those who do not meet those requirements can easily be cast into the role of 'villain.' Where a winner or someone perceived as a gracious loser may be valorized, a 'poor loser' or bully becomes the foil character of sport in the same Manichean logic that dominates discourses of race, gender, and other polarized identities.

Boxing was one of the first sports to allow Black athletes to participate, though with strict limitations.²⁸⁸ The sport was a key outlet for Talbot, a "means of salvation" from the rage and frustration he felt in his life.²⁸⁹ The sporting world combines physical

²⁸³ Yates, *From Plant to Politics*, 143-4.

²⁸⁴ Henderson, "Clarence Talbot Charged."

²⁸⁵ *Star* Staff Photographer, "Olympic hopefuls representing Windsor Amateur Boxing Club," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Mar. 4, 1972.

²⁸⁶ Brown, "Murder Suspect Faces Life."

²⁸⁷ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 1-2 & 33 109-10.

²⁸⁸ Mensah, *Black Canadians*, 186.

²⁸⁹ McLachlan, "Remains of a Dream."

labour and art, both fields where Black individuals have been permitted to find employment when there is a racial division of labour and culture that had been historically imposed. Therefore, sport was an arena where Black men were permitted to excel in racist colonial societies-- a space where outsiders were permitted to become heroes in the narrative.²⁹⁰ This may have been one of the reasons for Talbot's interest in becoming a professional boxer.²⁹¹ Talbot was a noted boxer the *Windsor Star* reported on Talbot's conquests in the ring and through the 1960s and 70s, including a 1971 piece predicting he was ready to head to the Olympics after he "stole the show" at a local bout.²⁹² Several of Talbot's sons followed him into a career in boxing.²⁹³

There was a hesitancy to introduce politics into the world of sports, whether through government regulation or through actions or statements by players in a manner similar to the reluctance for politics to be involved in labour relations.²⁹⁴ This was often explained as a desire to separate "physical" sports from the "mental" socio-cultural worlds of politics, as if sport existed in a vacuum from these things.²⁹⁵ Another similarity to labour is sport's use of bodies, especially Black bodies, as dispensable, to be used up and discarded when no longer working at their peak efficiency.²⁹⁶ Sports are considered to be inherently masculine and that masculinity is naturally tied to aggression and violence.²⁹⁷ Writing in 1994, sports reporter Lloyd McLachlan of the *Windsor Star* interviewed Talbot and released a very sympathetic article about his life, boxing, and

²⁹⁰ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 24 & 28-33.

²⁹¹ Milloy, *Blood Sweat and Fear*, 75.

²⁹² Jim McKay, "Talbot another Olympian?" *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Nov. 23, 1971.

²⁹³ Battagello, "Violent deaths stalk family."

²⁹⁴ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 46.

²⁹⁵ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 47.

²⁹⁶ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 68-9.

²⁹⁷ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 49-52.

Brook's death. McLachlan described Talbot's "bottled rage" and his attempts to find a healthy outlet for it before succumbing to it.²⁹⁸ A quote from Talbot highlighted in the article says "therapy made me feel lighter. I feel more comfortable talking to people. If I could look in a mirror and see myself 20 years ago, I'd be a completely different person."²⁹⁹ Talbot is echoing a commonly held sentiment where sports were tied to morals or were thought to teach the player a moral lesson. Many 'outreach programs' focus on this idea- and when the morals being taught are tied to a colonial project it is part of a heavily racialized project as well.³⁰⁰ His rediscovery of sports can be seen as part of the moral arc of his life where he was in control of his life and a better person for playing sports, and committed horrible acts through no fault of his own when he could not access sports.

When they heard about the case, a pair of civil rights lawyers from Toronto, Charles Roach and Michael Smith came down to Windsor with the purpose of representing Talbot, unaware they had already been beaten to the jail by local lawyer Harvey Strosberg.³⁰¹ The *Star* makes sure to note that Roach is a Black man and that Smith is white in their coverage.³⁰² Even though it was unusual to grant such a request, the Judge determined that Talbot would not receive a fair trial in Windsor and changed the venue for the trial to Toronto, which finally began on September 13, 1977.³⁰³ Brooks' death had prompted an unprecedented level of response in the city, and that the public reaction to the death was still inflamed even months after to the point that there were

²⁹⁸ McLachlan, "Remains of a Dream."

²⁹⁹ McLachlan, "Remains of a Dream."

³⁰⁰ Abdel-Shehid, *Who Da Man*, 32-3.

³⁰¹ Gary Rennie, "Charges dismissed against two lawyers," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 12, 1978.

³⁰² Rennie, "Charges dismissed against two lawyers."

³⁰³ Alan Henderson, "Judge approves switch of Talbot trial to Toronto," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Sep. 13, 1977.

security of the courts and of Talbot due to threats.³⁰⁴ When the trial ultimately moved to Toronto Strosberg suggested Edward Greenspan as his substitute, and not Roach and Smith.³⁰⁵ Strosberg later brought the Roach and Smith before the Law Society in 1978 accusing them of attempting to poach his client.³⁰⁶ The charges were ultimately dismissed. Roach testified at that hearing that he was concerned that “Talbot might be a victim of racism and the case might lead to increased racism in Windsor,” and that their only intention was to ensure that he had representation.³⁰⁷

There are many factors that can influence the outcome of a trial. A judge can influence a jury’s opinion directly through their control over what evidence and individuals are presented in the court and indirectly through their reactions or attitude towards evidence and individuals.³⁰⁸ Pressure from the public can influence the handling of cases by the justice system. And since the press is such an influence on public opinion, the press in turn influences the justice system. Public sentiment has historically played a major role in the Canadian Justice system.³⁰⁹ Psychiatrists have been called to provide expert testimony at murder trials in Canada on a routine basis since 1910, but the effectiveness of these experts as witnesses was limited by their ability to appeal to the “common sense” or popular understanding of the topic by the jury members and judges.³¹⁰ Expert witnesses helped to provide a sense of objectivity to the arguments being made by lawyers as they tried to convince the laymen of the jury to believe their

³⁰⁴ Henderson, “Judge approves switch of Talbot trial to Toronto.”

³⁰⁵ *Star Staff Reporters*, “Talbot trial on Dec. 5,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Sep. 29, 1977.

³⁰⁶ Rennie, “Charges dismissed against two lawyers.”

³⁰⁷ Rennie, “Charges dismissed against two lawyers.”

³⁰⁸ Paul Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 130-1.

³⁰⁹ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 49.

³¹⁰ White, *Negotiating Responsibility*, 35-7 & 47.

version of events or reality.³¹¹ Experts were expected to perform a comprehensive evaluation of the accused to evaluate their ability to reason and understand their own actions and to understand their unique socio-cultural and medical history and compare it to diagnostic criteria outlined by the field when making their assessments of insanity.³¹²

Individual responsibility has always been a core tenant of the British and American legal systems, built off of concepts of free choice that did not consider the influences of factors like race, class, gender and creed on the actions of individuals.³¹³ Precedence for the handling of mental competency in murder trials was set by the 1843 British case *R v M'Naughten* which resulted in a set of “rules,” which outlined possible issues related to the sanity of an accused person- the presumption of sanity, burden of proof for proving insanity, the ability to know right from wrong and to act accordingly, the presence or absence of delusions, and rules for court conduct.³¹⁴ The *Canadian Criminal Code* was adopted in 1890 and used a version of the *M'Naughten Rules* until the 1990s.³¹⁵ Mental capacity was used as a stand in for race during legal trials in Canada up until the 1950s, with racism encoded into conceptions of mental capacity and interpretations of individual actions during court proceedings.³¹⁶ Through the 1960s and 70s there was a trend of increasing psychological diagnoses and confinement of Black men to mental institutions.³¹⁷ These institutions were a “third place” to which the state could send those it deemed to be undesirable as a way of “spatializing and discharging”

³¹¹ White, *Negotiating Responsibility*, 48.

³¹² Graham Glancy and Cheryl Regehr, *Canadian Landmark Cases in Forensic Mental Health*, (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 65-7.

³¹³ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 132.

³¹⁴ Glancy and Regehr, *Canadian Landmark Case* 56- 60.

³¹⁵ Glancy and Regehr, *Canadian Landmark Cases*, 63-4.

³¹⁶ White, *Negotiating Responsibility*, 81-2 & 99.

³¹⁷ McCann, ““Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,””135.

the terror it must instill in order to maintain the hierarchies that exist.³¹⁸ This worked to clearly define who was protected and who was not by the society.³¹⁹ The state must then generate a reason that these ‘undesirables’ cannot be allowed freedom within the state, “the security state thrives on a *state of insecurity*, which it participates in fomenting and to which it claims to be the solution.”³²⁰ Mental hygiene was increasingly touted as a concern in Canadian society at the time.

In August of 1977, a Windsor psychiatrist provisionally deemed Talbot sane at the time he shot and killed Brooks, but that opinion changed over the course of the trial. Talbot had not wanted to pursue an insanity-based defense and was wary of being indefinitely institutionalized out of concern that community or political pressures from Windsorites might result in a longer sentence than a criminal charge.³²¹ The psychiatrist’s initial assessment was that he had a “fragile personality that may appear intact on the surface” but that “minimal stress or provocation” could result in a “breakdown of Talbot’s personality structure.”³²² The doctor testifying that symptoms of Talbot’s like amnesia could indicate “insanity or psychological reaction” at the time of the shooting.³²³ Talbot reported being extremely distressed, becoming “sick” and “dizzy” when he found out the Union could not help him get his job back even though Brooks had allegedly promised to help him the previous October.³²⁴ The psychological theories focused on by the psychiatrist have more to do with the personal stressors in Talbot’s life, and the

³¹⁸ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 34.

³¹⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 35.

³²⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 54.

³²¹ Henderson, “Talbot charge reduced.”

³²² Alan Henderson, “Psychiatrist’s testimony heard at Talbot’s trial,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 14, 1977.

³²³ Henderson, “Psychiatrist’s testimony heard at Talbot’s trial.”

³²⁴ Henderson, “Psychiatrist’s testimony heard at Talbot’s trial.”

“tension and anxiety” that plagued him as a consequence.³²⁵ The psychiatrist found it unusual that Talbot was resistant to and frightened about being injected with sodium-pentothal “truth serum” and that he acted “aggravated and potentially dangerous” if confronted.³²⁶ The psychiatrist noted that “Talbot was described as once having a personality similar to his brother Clayton, who the doctor found to be intelligent, affable and reasonable” but that he now displayed traits consistent with a “paranoid psychotic” and was unable to understand and “appreciate the nature and quality of his act” when the shooting occurred.³²⁷ Talbot reported that he had developed delusions, thinking that the union executives were only calling him into a meeting “so he could be laughed at” and that while he could not remember most of the event, he did hear Brooks call him a “son of a bitch” before he was shot.³²⁸ Talbot’s lawyer pushed for a sentence of manslaughter rather than insanity at Talbot’s request.³²⁹ By December 17, 1977, Talbot had been found not guilty by reason of insanity by an Ontario Supreme Court jury.³³⁰

Around the time of the trial, novel research in the humanities had led to discussions of the alienation of Black Canadian individuals from national society, politics and the means of production, and how these issues compounded each other.³³¹ Psychoanalysts like Frantz Fanon pointed to “violence as having a cleansing effect on oppressed individuals.”³³² Frustration at this was thought to be expressed either constructively through community organizing or through more destructive means

³²⁵ Henderson, “Psychiatrist’s testimony heard at Talbot’s trial.”

³²⁶ Henderson, “Psychiatrist’s testimony heard at Talbot’s trial.”

³²⁷ Henderson, “Talbot charge reduced.”

³²⁸ Alan Henderson, “Talbot’s fate in hands of jury,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 16, 1977.

³²⁹ Henderson, “Talbot’s fate.”

³³⁰ Alan Henderson, “Talbot was insane, jury finds,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Dec. 17, 1977.

³³¹ McClain, *Alienation and Resistance*, 3 & 45-6.

³³² McClain, *Alienation and Resistance*, 48.

including “direct physical aggression” against “a substitute target... whom he has immediate access” if they are unable to access the true “source of oppression.”³³³ Fanon and other civil rights driven experts at the time believed that events like these killings were caused by the pressures of racial injustice aggravating existing mental illness until the individual erupts into “collective catharsis” through expressions of rage- which William Grier and Price Cobbs labeled “Black Rage” in their seminal 1968 text of the same name.³³⁴ Rather than moralizing rage, there were pushes to understand it as an expression of deeper issues. Theorists like bell hooks believed “rage is a necessary and usually healthy response to white supremacy” and the result of grief and depression at the mental strain of systemic abuse.³³⁵ Some thought it was self-protective for the mind of the individual to redirect externally imposed self-hatred onto another, either the oppressor or in the form of “blind violence.”³³⁶ The ‘Black Rage’ defense represented an American cultural debate that brought the relationships between “law, race, culture, penalty, and justice” into question in Western liberal democracies like Canada.³³⁷

The 1970 workplace shootings of three by Black worker James Johnson Jr. at Chrysler’s Eldon Plant in Detroit, Michigan had parallels to the Talbot case which cannot be ignored in this analysis. When comparing the Johnson and Talbot cases, one is struck by the fact that despite the different handling of the case by defenses, both men ended up with the same fate- indefinite detainment in a mental institution. Unlike Windsor, in 1968 sixty percent of the workforce at Eldon was made up of Black workers.³³⁸ Like Johnson,

³³³ McClain, *Alienation and Resistance*, 4 & 48.

³³⁴ McCann, “‘Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,’” 136.

³³⁵ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 144.

³³⁶ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 145.

³³⁷ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 421.

³³⁸ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 321-2.

Talbot's upbringing had seen him endure "prejudice, insecurity, loneliness, a lack of nurturing, an escalating sense of paranoia... a life ruled by the aggressive behavior and violence each of those factors can generate."³³⁹ There was a link made between childhood environment and psychological abnormality in these type of defenses.³⁴⁰ Over the course of his trial, Johnson was used by both his defense and the prosecution as a platform to make political arguments about race and labour.³⁴¹ Harris believed that there as a "common theme: Oppressed people fill with rage, which they turn upon themselves, causing mental illness and crime--" that ran through the two theories.³⁴² His defense advanced a theory where Johnson's workplace traumas were intensified by the pressures of living in a white supremacist society.³⁴³ Johnson's defense argued that a pre-existing psychiatric condition that had been manageable outside of the workplace were significantly aggravated by the "racism and unsafe working conditions" in the plant which resulted in his breakdown."³⁴⁴ It was Chrysler that had "created a 'plant culture' that would lead inevitably to a worker exploding in violence."³⁴⁵ Johnson was one of many workers at the plant forced to end sick leaves early, leading to risk of further injury and death, one factor his defense pointed to during his trial.³⁴⁶ A rank-and-file insurgent group focussed on rights for Black workers paid for Johnson's lawyers for his trial and subsequent workplace compensation suit.³⁴⁷

³³⁹ McLachlan, "Remains of a Dream."

³⁴⁰ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 128.

³⁴¹ McCann, "'Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,'" 151.

³⁴² Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 41.

³⁴³ McCann, "'Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,'" 142.

³⁴⁴ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 113.

³⁴⁵ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 117.

³⁴⁶ McCann, "'Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,'" 143.

³⁴⁷ Brenner, et al., eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, 325.

Johnson's trial was an opportunity for his lawyers to outline the struggles faced by Black working class Americans and to further enshrine the "Black Rage" defense in the legal system.³⁴⁸ No equivalent defense had been developed within the Canadian legal system at the time, but Johnson's case and others would have been known about, especially in Windsor where much of the media consumed is American in origin. Civil Rights lawyers in Ontario, like the ones who fought to represent Talbot in his trial, may have been eager to begin developing the defense within the Canadian legal system. The precedent could be considered less necessary in Canada where the *Criminal Code* already demanded that judges increase or reduce sentences for defendants based on "any relevant aggravating or mitigating circumstances relating to the offence or the offender" with an open-ended list of suggested influences to a case.³⁴⁹

Defenses like "Black Rage" could in some cases be considered a 'benevolently' racist argument in defense of individuals facing trial by discursively tying Blackness and violence. Racism in the system did not always result in harsher sentencing. It could also present as lighter sentences being administered to Black or Indigenous individuals based on a perception of inherent irrationality or criminality.³⁵⁰ Judges routinely adopted a position of "condescension and paternalism toward Black defendants."³⁵¹ However intentioned, these "Black rage" and insanity argument ultimately adopt the dominant narrative of Black people being violent or irrational.³⁵² Gilroy proposed that there is sometimes rationality in actions that seem irrational, that suicide by enslaved persons

³⁴⁸ Harris, *Black Rage Confronts the Law*, 36.

³⁴⁹ Walker, *African Canadian Legal Odyssey*, 422-3 & 429.

³⁵⁰ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 11.

³⁵¹ Walker, *Race on Trial*, 87.

³⁵² McCann, "'Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,'" 151.

could “be represented as agency” in that by killing themselves they exerted power and agency over their own lives through their deaths.³⁵³ Perhaps Talbot was engaging in a kind of suicidal action when he attacked Brooks, bringing an end to his life as it was when he shot the union president. Perhaps Talbot was a mentally ill man. Perhaps Talbot was a man who succumbed to the pressures of work and racism and snapped. Perhaps Talbot was incensed by anti-Brooks rhetoric, and it was a politically driven action. As it stands, we cannot know Talbot’s exact reasons for shooting Brooks, but we can try to understand the environment around the occurrences that January day and begin to ask the questions.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS

Clarence Talbot was a man who lived a life of difficult circumstances, whose life and death would have gone largely unnoted if not for his actions on January 17th, 1977. He was clearly a man who existed under multiple intersecting oppressions which made his life difficult and who needed to express his frustrations. And yet many people survive under these pressures without reactively expressing themselves the way Talbot does, so is it fair to label a case like this in systemic terms? The discourse that the attack was random and caused by personal insanity rather than it being a reaction to the pressures of oppression absolves Canadians of having to take systemic action to change the structure of their society. The Canadian code of silence around race is so efficient and entrenched because it demands no action.

There were tensions in the plant between rank-and-file workers and the union executives, there was a separation between the union elite and the union members where

³⁵³ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 91.

the executive thought to be siding with the company at the expense of the workers. In Canada, the Union had become an institution within the labour power structure, and its formalization had caused conflict between more radical labour activists and powerful entities like the UAW. At a time when workers were receiving radical messaging that accused labour leaders like Brooks to be protectors of the status quo, that he could be come to be seen as an enemy to the rank-and-file and therefore a target.

By looking at the conditions in which Brook's death occurred we are not seeking a singular cause to blame for what happened but looking to understand the context from which it arose and in which it was understood by the public at the time. By looking at the way the press discussed the case, and what they refused to discuss, we can estimate the public knowledge and understanding of the case. Public response played an influential role in Talbot's trial, with the collective reaction being a key reason for the trial's change of venue. The media played a key role in enflaming public opinion on the case, and their unfiltered content and seemingly unlimited access inundated the public with details about the case and opinions from a range of figures. The media created a spectacle around Brooks' death and Talbot's trial and presented the incident as an act of madness rather than as the result of a man under pressure from a society offered him little support or understanding.

To many it may seem that Talbot had received a lenient sentence. However, being institutionalized at a mental-health facility was a prospect intensely feared by Talbot for its potential for indefinite detainment and abuse. Media at the time had covered the horrible conditions at Ontario facilities quite extensively. The mental health facilities that criminally sentenced patients were sent to were notorious for having comparable or

worse conditions to prison systems. The keeping of ‘undesirables’ was a key function of institutions like asylums, they were spaces where “state violence can be administered” outside of the criminal justice system.³⁵⁴ They are key institutions in the colonial state.³⁵⁵ The state hospital where Johnson was sent upon being found not guilty for reasons of insanity was known for having “disproportionately warehoused black bodies deemed” ineligible for “participation in civil society,” much in the way the prison system does, only without a clear timeline of sentencing.³⁵⁶

After several years at a maximum-security psychiatric facility in Penetanguishene, Ontario, Talbot was transferred to a medium-security institution in St. Thomas in 1980.³⁵⁷ At the time, that center was experiencing profound crowding issues and funding cuts that resulted in the early release of patients at high levels.³⁵⁸ Talbot had an annual review to determine if he would be released, but the concerned Windsor public was assured he would not be back in the city even if freed.³⁵⁹ In 1987, Talbot’s warrant was vacated and he was allowed out of St Thomas as well. In 2012, the *Windsor Star* had an editorial discussing Talbot and the violent deaths of three of his sons.³⁶⁰ One son, Clarence Jr., died by suicide in 1999. Another son was fatally shot in Calgary in 2011. A third was shot and killed three months later in London, Ontario, which inspired the article’s creation. The *Star* framed these deaths as a legacy. It seemed to imply the loss of his sons

³⁵⁴ Maynard, *Policing Black Lives*, 7.

³⁵⁵ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 147.

³⁵⁶ McCann, “‘Chrysler Pulled the Trigger,’” 150-1.

³⁵⁷ Ciaran Ganley, “Ontario Cabinet gets Talbot status report,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), July 30, 1981.

³⁵⁸ Tom McMahan, “Health cuts blamed for early release of mental patients,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Mar. 2, 1977.

³⁵⁹ *Star* Staff Reporter, “Talbot to stay in St. Thomas institution,” *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Oct. 1, 1981. Ganley, “Ontario Cabinet gets Talbot status report.”

³⁶⁰ Battagello, “Violent deaths stalk family.”

is part of Talbot's punishment for shooting Brooks. One person interviewed responded to the information of Talbot's sons' deaths with the phrase "what goes around comes around," as if it was the karmic outcome of Talbot's actions in 1977.³⁶¹ On July 4, 2003, Clarence Talbot died suddenly at 63 years old while at Ring London Boxing Club after suffering a heart attack.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Battagello, "Violent deaths stalk family."

³⁶² Obituary, "Talbot, Clarence," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jul. 8, 2003. Dave Battagello, "Talbot's family blood," *Windsor Star* (Windsor, ON), Jan. 24, 2012 (updated Apr. 3, 2020), accessed Feb. 3, 2023, <https://windsorstar.com/news/talbots-family-blood>.

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