

CHAPTER TWO: LENOIR HALL AND MANNING HALL

In the fall of 2005, the Campaign for Historical Accuracy and Truth (CHAT), a student organization devoted to using the history of the University to support ongoing struggles for justice in Chapel Hill, circulated a petition. “We ask that the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill establish a definite process...to commemorate the historic 1969 Lenoir Cafeteria workers’ strike, by, among other things, placing a plaque honoring the workers, their leaders, and their allies on the front entrance of Lenoir Hall,” they wrote to Chancellor James Moeser.¹⁵¹ Members of CHAT were not the first students activated by the legacy of the Foodworkers’ Strikes, a movement to improve the working conditions of the mostly Black female workers who cooked, cleaned, and served food to students and faculty in the University’s dining halls. Chris Baumann, a white student and member of the class of 1993, was inspired to organize with Black low-wage housekeeping staff in the 1990s after seeing a documentary about the Foodworkers’ Strikes, *Women on the Front Lines*. “We were starting to have meetings at the old Black Cultural Center and at one of the meetings, [the housekeepers] came and they showed the video of the 1969 cafeteria workers strike,” Baumann remembered. “And for me, I had always admired the

¹⁵¹ Petition from CHAT to Chancellor James Moeser regarding Lenoir plaque in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

civil rights movement and you hoped if you had been there in the [19]60s, you would have done the right thing. And so, for me, it was put up or shut up. Now's your chance."¹⁵²

The stories of Baumann's political activation and CHAT's petition drive demonstrate how the Foodworkers' Strikes of 1969 have operated as a crucial narrative in counter-storytelling for generations of organizers at the University, who have drawn on the legacy of the Foodworkers' Strikes as a model for forceful protest against institutionalized injustice. Two buildings on campus, where most of the actions of the movement occurred, illustrate how Black workers, supported by Black and white students, contested a space of oppressive institutional power and created their own space of community resistance. Lenoir Hall, the central dining facility on the North Campus, became the site of dramatic conflict between students, administrators, foodworkers, and police, demonstrating for future campus movements how to transform a space by contesting the ways in which white supremacy operated within it. Manning Hall, the former home of the School of Law located behind Lenoir Hall, became the space that foodworkers and their student and faculty supporters created to gather together during the strikes. This chapter argues that the history of Lenoir and Manning Halls during the Foodworkers' Strikes reveal how the University ignores Black students' and workers' contestations of institutional power structures and eliminates spaces of community created by Black students and workers, two methods of reproducing the institution's anti-Blackness. The history of these spaces also reveals how the Foodworkers' Strikes became such a potent story for future racial justice movements, providing a dynamic, successful model of how to challenge the University's white supremacy.

¹⁵² Interview with Chris Baumann by Charlotte Fryar, 21 December 2017, L-0450.

The First Strike

Oppressive employment conditions for the foodworkers and a series of layoffs in the Pine Room, the dining area on the bottom floor of Lenoir Hall, catalyzed movement towards a strike in 1968. While Lenoir Hall was and remains the central dining hall on the campus, foodworkers also worked in Chase Dining Hall, located on South Campus, and the Monogram Club, a private dining facility located in the current Jackson Hall on North Campus. Elizabeth Brooks, who worked in the Pine Room and became one of the leaders in the strikes, reported in a 1974 interview that during this time, management across the dining halls and in particular, Director of University Food Services, George Prillaman, cut workers' paychecks, created inefficient work schedules, and refused to give raises or promotions to Black workers. "He would stand in the back of the room and he would just watch over us," Brooks described. "He made us feel like we were being watched at all times...He made us feel like we were just a like a bunch of slaves."¹⁵³

As their organizing got off the ground, foodworkers sought the support of students and faculty. In October 1968, foodworkers presented to Chancellor J. Carlyle Sitterson a list of grievances, including receiving below-minimum wage pay, being forced to work split shifts (which required them to spend time on campus without pay), and working under white supervisors who treated them with discriminatory attitudes. The foodworkers formed this list of grievances with the help of Preston Dobbins, Reggie Hawkins, Jack McLean, and Eric Clay, all members of the Black Student Movement (BSM), the student organization which became the strongest ally for the foodworkers.¹⁵⁴ In November 1967, Black students at the University

¹⁵³ Interview with Elizabeth Brooks by Beverly Washington Jones, 2 October 1974, E-0058.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Elizabeth Brooks by Beverly Washington Jones, 2 October 1974, E-0058.

created the BSM by voting to shutter the campus chapter of the NAACP, considered by Preston Dobbins, the BSM's new president, to be too "antique" to effectively support the needs of Black students and workers.¹⁵⁵

The BSM was a part of a national social movement led by Black students at both white and Black colleges and universities across the country from the late 1960s into the early 1970s. Martha Biondi, in her history of this movement explains that organizations like the BSM, "challenged fundament tenets of university life," insisting that "public universities should reflect and serve the people of their communities."¹⁵⁶ Drawing on the rhetoric and political analysis from the rising national Black Power movement, the BSM, from its very beginning, connected the movement for Black student rights with Black workers rights. And as the BSM became more involved in the foodworkers' movement, the organization kept their focus on the workers and the Black community of Chapel Hill, arguing for self-determination for Black workers at the University. Ashley Davis, a graduate of 1972 and member of the BSM, explained this focus and argument clearly: "Our role was to support and give assistance [to the foodworkers] and it was that from the beginning to the end. Support and assistance."¹⁵⁷

In December 1968, the Black Student Movement also issued a list of demands to the administration, prominently including the need for better working conditions, pay, and treatment for Black non-academic employees. Other demands included the establishment of and support for a Department of Afro-American Studies, the recruitment of Black faculty, and that the

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Preston Dobbins by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, 4 December 1974, E-0063.

¹⁵⁶ Martha Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2014), 2.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974, E-0062.

University use its power to alleviate issues in the Black community of Chapel Hill related to housing and public sanitation (all of which remain ongoing issues at the University).¹⁵⁸ While ignoring the requests for meetings from workers, Chancellor Sitterson, after six weeks, provided a patronizing response to the BSM's demands, asserting that the "University cannot, in policy or practice, provide unique treatment for any single race, color or creed; to do so would be a step backward."¹⁵⁹ Sitterson's response exemplified a strategy that the institution would continue to employ with Black students and workers who disputed the anti-Black institutional processes through which the University operated. Because the BSM highlighted racial difference rather than ignoring it, the University's administrators marked the BSM as a delinquent organization, antithetical to the inherent liberalism of the institution, which in turn, the BSM argued was a facade that served only to protect institutional white supremacy.

Although administrators had made false promises to workers in the past regarding improved working conditions, a core group of seven foodworkers—Mary Smith, Elizabeth Brooks, Esther Jeffries, Elsie Davis, Sarah Parker, Verlie Moore, and Amy Lyons—asked for one more meeting. In early February 1969, administrators agreed to meet with the foodworkers again to discuss potential solutions to payroll issues, but at the meeting's conclusion, administrators once again proposed no real changes either to pay or to working conditions.¹⁶⁰ "We had lost all confidence in them," Brooks described. "We had just gotten to a point where we

¹⁵⁸ Black Student Demands in the Black Student Movement of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40400, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁵⁹ Chancellor Sitterson Response to Black Student Demands in the Office of Chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: Joseph Carlyle Sitterson Records #40022, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁶⁰ J. Derek Williams, "It Wasn't Slavery Time Anymore:' Foodworkers' Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969," (Master's Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979), 79; Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974, E-0062.

didn't trust any of them. Because we caught them all in lies. None of them had told us anything that they had really followed through with.” On Friday, February 21st, Prillaman commanded Brooks to do a job that was not part of her regular duties, speaking to her in a demeaning way. “I told him that it made no difference to me, because it wasn’t slavery time anymore and regardless of what he told me, I still had a choice,” she explained. “I could do it, or I didn't have to. So this was something that added to the strike.”¹⁶¹

On Sunday evening, two days later, Elizabeth Brooks and Mary Smith led a group of foodworkers in the Pine Room on strike. Foodworkers set up and prepared their counters as usual, but when their supervisor opened the doors of Lenoir Hall to let in students, the foodworkers sat down at the dining tables, refusing to respond to their supervisors, who attempted to cajole the workers into resuming their posts. Elizabeth Brooks recounted that their supervisor “looked at us and he said, ‘What on the world is going on,’ and so somebody said, ‘We are on strike’ . . . it almost frightened him to death.”¹⁶² In their decision to go on strike, the foodworkers directly challenged a central anti-Black belief through which the University operated: “the Black is not a relational being but is always-already property . . . whether or not an individual owns them.”¹⁶³ By refusing to be treated as fungible bodies in service to the institution, the foodworkers opposed the institutional processes which denied them their humanity and thus, their right to a living wage.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Interview with Elizabeth Brooks by Beverly Washington Jones, 2 October 1974, E-0058.

¹⁶² Interview with Elizabeth Brooks by Beverly Washington Jones, 2 October 1974, E-0058.

¹⁶³ T. Elon Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis, “Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era,” *Urban Education* 53, No. 2 (2018): 181.

¹⁶⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of subjection: Terror, slavery and self-making in nineteenth-century America*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997), 26.

On Monday morning, approximately one hundred foodworkers were absent from their posts in the dining halls in Lenoir Hall, Chase Hall, and the Monogram Club. Only Lenoir Hall remained open, though the BSM worked in shifts to block the food service lines to slow down use of the cafeteria. Through the remainder of February, the foodworkers and their supporters rallied, holding speaking events outside Lenoir Hall and garnering the support of students, faculty, and community members. “We had high school students, that came over and had rallies. We had also college students, from other colleges to come over and have rallies and to speak at rallies for us,” Brooks described of the outside support.¹⁶⁵ Although a handful of workers, intimidated by Prillaman’s threats of mass firings, crossed the picket line and returned to work, support for the striking workers’ cause continued to grow, particularly among liberal-leaning white students. Beginning in March, members of the Campus Y, the New University Conference, and the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), three white student organizations, began to stage “stall-ins” in the service line of Lenoir Hall.¹⁶⁶

Contesting White Supremacy in Lenoir Hall, Creating A Counter-Space in Manning Hall

White students, overall, did not support the strike, not just because it disrupted their dining routine but because it fundamentally disputed white claims on the cultural landscape. On March 4th, several white students aggressively broke through the SSOC stall-in and a fight erupted. One of the SSOC boycotters emptied ammonia in one part of the dining room and another needed fifteen stitches after being hit on the head with a sugar dispenser.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Elizabeth Brooks by Beverly Washington Jones, 2 October 1974, E-0058.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974, E-0062.

¹⁶⁷ William A. Link, *William Friday: Power, Purpose, and American Higher Education*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 146.

Approximately fifty members of the BSM, fifty white supporters, and twenty-five Black Chapel Hill non-student citizens entered Lenoir Hall during the fight and began to overturn chairs and tables, and the University's administrators dispatched riot-equipped Chapel Hill police to empty and close Lenoir Hall.¹⁶⁸ In this demonstration, considered by many participants to be the pinnacle of the first strike, protestors directly contested the space of Lenoir Hall and the ways in which it represented the institutional power structures which denied the foodworkers their humanity by treating them as property, from which labor could be extracted.¹⁶⁹ By attacking the institution's anti-Blackness designated by Lenoir Hall, the demonstrators advanced the method of contesting space on the campus, which would become a crucial organizing approach for future students.

At the beginning of the strike in February, members of the BSM reserved Manning Hall as a general meeting place for the strikers and their supporters. Black students and workers transformed Manning Hall into a space of respite from the picket lines and security from the police and other antagonistic groups. It served until its forced closing as a social counter-space for the protestors, which would "counter the hegemony of racist and other oppressive ideologies and practices of the institution and its members."¹⁷⁰ In the front lobby of the building, the foodworkers' organized a "soul food cafeteria," serving fried chicken and french fries to the boycotters of the dining halls in exchange for contributions to the strike. "By running the

¹⁶⁸ J. Derek Williams, "It Wasn't Slavery Time Anymore: Foodworkers' Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969," (Master's Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979), 115-117; Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974.

¹⁶⁹ Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, No. 8 (June 1993): 1729.

¹⁷⁰ Dorinda J. Carter, "Role of Identity-Affirming Counter-Spaces in a Predominantly White High School," *The Journal of Negro Education* 76, No. 4 (Fall 2007): 543.

cafeteria,” said Ashley Davis, “they made enough money that we were able to pay every worker \$35 a week,” which made up about half of the foodworkers’ lost weekly wages.¹⁷¹ The BSM also created a donation fund that served as an additional source of income for the striking workers.¹⁷²

Following the closing of Lenoir Hall, foodworkers and their supporters met in Manning Hall with their new attorneys, Julius Chambers (an early Black graduate of the University’s School of Law and Adam Stein, who encouraged them to form a union. The UNC Non-Academic Employees Union formed on March 5th, with a formal series of requests: a minimum wage of \$1.80 per hour, time-and-a-half pay for overtime work, and the appointment of a Black supervisor.¹⁷³ In Manning Hall, Black workers and students created more than a headquarters for their movement, building a space which operated, though only temporarily, as one of the first gathering spaces on the campus for a community of Black workers and students. Although it has been somewhat diminished in remembrances of the first strike, it is crucial in constructing a history of the Foodworkers’ Strikes and the longer history of Black freedom striving on the campus to understand how Manning Hall operated as an essential counter-space for Black workers and students to validate each other in their cause.

Because of the BSM’s involvement in the strike, University officials and other public administrators were more concerned, following the closing of Lenoir Hall, about student disruptions and demonstrations than the grievances of their employees. At nearby Duke University in Durham, fifty Black students had taken over the administration building in early

¹⁷¹ Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974, E-0062.

¹⁷² Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974, E-0062.

¹⁷³ J. Derek Williams, “It Wasn’t Slavery Time Anymore:’ Foodworkers’ Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969,” (Master’s Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979), 120.

February, and efforts led by state police to oust the students led to a melee of tear gas and police violence against the students. When North Carolina Governor Bob Scott intervened in the Chapel Hill strike on March 6th by calling for the deployment of the National Guard to Durham (in case they were needed to quell any violence that might erupt in Chapel Hill), he and other University officials were likely considering the events at Duke and the potential need to subdue any demonstrations of direct action led by Black students.¹⁷⁴ To ostensibly keep order on the campus and to reopen Lenoir Hall for breakfast, five squads of state Highway Patrolmen, ordered in by Scott and dressed in riot gear, lined the north and south entrances to Lenoir Hall, while picketing continued. This dramatic escalation of police presence fragmented the University community, inciting division between students, faculty, and staff as they sided either with the protestors or with the University's administration.¹⁷⁵

With student support of the strike so significant and visible, the public perception of the strike was not of a movement for better treatment and pay for Black low-wage workers but a violent display of Black student protest.¹⁷⁶ Still fearful that the University of North Carolina would become the next site for a student take-over of the campus like those at Duke University that February or Columbia University in 1968, Governor Scott ordered the arrests of any students who refused to vacate Manning Hall. Campus police evacuated eight students before storming the building and shuttering its life as a counter-space for Black students and workers. In an

¹⁷⁴ William A. Link, *William Friday: Power, Purpose, and American Higher Education*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 143.

¹⁷⁵ J. Derek Williams, "It Wasn't Slavery Time Anymore: Foodworkers' Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969," (Master's Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979), 171-181.

¹⁷⁶ Strike Chronology and Conclusion, compiled by Buck Goldstein, in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40124, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

address to students the following day, Sitterson, acting on a view of himself as a liberal leader of a progressive institution, praised Black students for their “dignified manner” in the evacuation of Manning Hall, lecturing them on the need for civility over disruption in future discourse. The closing of Manning Hall on March 13th as the headquarters for the Black workers and students was a representative example of the University’s willful elimination of Black-created spaces on the campus for the sake of maintaining liberal order, though the legacy of Manning Hall as a critical counter-space against the institution’s anti-Blackness would serve as a precedent for future Black students in creating their own counter-spaces.¹⁷⁷

The University’s administration, particularly the University System President Bill Friday and Chancellor Sitterson, were eager to end the strike as soon as possible after the dramatic show of police intimidation, and they began working with the foodworkers’ union and their legal representation towards a settlement. The first strike officially ended on March 21, 1969 after the University, working with Governor Bob Scott, agreed to pay \$180,000 in back pay and raise hourly wages from \$1.60 to \$1.80 per hour. This pay increase affected not just foodworkers at the University but other state employees “subject to the State Personnel Act in similar categories,” who earned less than \$1.80 per hour.¹⁷⁸ John Sellars, a member of the BSM and graduate of 1971, explained the significance of the settlement, stating, “we were focusing on the cafeteria workers, but that also included the laundry workers, the janitors and maids, groundskeepers, anyone who was employed by the UNC operations department who wasn’t

¹⁷⁷ J. Derek Williams, “It Wasn’t Slavery Time Anymore:’ Foodworkers’ Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969,” (Master’s Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979), 207.

¹⁷⁸ J. Derek Williams, “It Wasn’t Slavery Time Anymore:’ Foodworkers’ Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969,” (Master’s Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979), 235; Wayne Hurder, “Scott Orders Employee Pay Hike As Fuller Urges Class Boycott,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 22 March 1969, 1.

getting treated fairly.”¹⁷⁹ Following their victory, the foodworkers and their supporters held a rally on Polk Place. Howard Fuller, a Black Power activist and recent founder of Durham’s Malcolm X Liberation University who had been a vocal supporter of the strikes, spoke to the crowd, stating that the University had “finally begun to see that a student has the right to say something and that workers have the right to be treated like humans.”¹⁸⁰

The Second Strike

That May, the University, in an effort to distance itself from a reprisal of events that winter, signed a contract to turn over the operations of the dining halls to a private company, SAGA Food Services. By the end of the summer, SAGA had laid off many part-time workers, and some low-wage workers across the campus were still waiting for the University to fulfill promises that it had made that spring, including increasing pay. “Soon after SAGA food company came in, I almost knew there would be another strike,” Brooks remembered. “Just didn’t know it was going to be as early as it was.”¹⁸¹ On November 7, 1969, almost 250 foodworkers began a second strike, demanding “recognition of a union, a job classification program, and the rehiring of 10 employees fired or laid off within the last week allegedly for pro-union activities.” SAGA refused to recognize the UNC Non-Academic Employees Union, which had previously been recognized by the state as the representative of the foodworkers, and

¹⁷⁹ Interview with John Sellars by Alex Ford, 8 November 2015, N-0042.

¹⁸⁰ Wayne Hurder, “Scott Orders Employee Pay Hike As Fuller Urges Class Boycott,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 22 March 1969, 1.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Elizabeth Brooks by Beverly Washington Jones, 2 October 1974, E-0058.

movement towards a quick resolution stalled as SAGA threatened to fire even more workers over the strike.¹⁸²

Students, including members of the BSM, once again held protests in support of the workers, standing on the picket lines and organizing boycotts of all dining facilities, including dormitory kitchens. By November 9th, over three hundred foodworkers were on strike and only two of six dining facilities around the campus were open, though understaffed.¹⁸³ As with the first strike, the BSM, along with sympathetic white students, arranged for a boycott of the dining halls, encouraging students to donate to the Food Workers' Assistance Fund, organized by the Campus Y. Boycotting students were encouraged to eat at the Baptist Student Union, which operated as a temporary dining facility for boycotters; but unlike Manning Hall during the first strike, it did not serve as a community space for the foodworkers and their supporters.¹⁸⁴

As picketing around the dining halls continued through mid-November, Chapel Hill and campus police occupied the entrances to both Lenoir and Chase Dining Halls in order to keep the buildings open. Six days into the strike, on November 13th, Chapel Hill police charged two foodworkers with assault and resisting arrest after they stood in front of a back door to Chase Hall and two police officers "suffered scalp lacerations" after being hit with milk crates.¹⁸⁵ Police violence and the arrests of foodworkers and their student supporters continued through the second strike, with several incidents of struggles, usually begun as a result of police-induced

¹⁸² Al Thomas, "Food Service Workers Strike: 4 Dining Halls Closed, *The Daily Tar Heel*, 8 November 1969, 1.

¹⁸³ Al Thomas, "Food Service Workers Strike: 4 Dining Halls Closed, *The Daily Tar Heel*, 8 November 1969, 1.

¹⁸⁴ Strike Newsletter #1, November 1969 in the Campus Y of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁸⁵ Al Thomas, "Chase Scuffle Ends In Arrests, Injuries," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 13 November 1969, 1.

standoffs between picketers and police. Jack McLean, the chairperson of the BSM, writing in *Black Ink*, explained that “the violence created by the Chapel Hill Gestapo force on peaceful demonstrators is a clear example that the Southern part of heaven has been captured by the roaring waves of fascism in this country. The irony is not that violence exists in the country but that it exists in the peace loving community of Chapel Hill.”¹⁸⁶ The violence McLean described reached its peak on December 4th in front of Lenoir Hall when, “wielding nightsticks and brandishing shotguns,” approximately twenty-five police “charged a group of demonstrators when the group refused to heed police orders to disperse.” Nine demonstrators, the majority of them members of the BSM, were arrested and four were injured by the police.¹⁸⁷

Negotiations between the foodworkers and SAGA to settle the strike failed throughout November as SAGA refused to work with union representatives or agree to the rehiring of laid-off workers. On November 21st, a majority of full-time workers in the UNC Non-Academic Employees Union voted to affiliate with the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union (itself affiliated with the national AFL-CIO), bringing national attention and resources to the strike. Even after the vote to affiliate with a national labor union, the University’s administration maintained that any settlement of the strike did not involve them, only SAGA.¹⁸⁸ But beginning in December, Black students from across North Carolina began organizing to convene at the University for a massive demonstration of support for the foodworkers. James Westerbrook, a representative from SAGA leading potential

¹⁸⁶ Jack McLean, “Honeymoon Over,” *Black Ink*, December 1969, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Al Thomas, “Violence Erupts At Lenoir,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 5 December 1969, 1; Al Thomas, “SAGA Seeks Governor’s Help,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 6 December 1969, 1.

¹⁸⁸ Strike Newsletter #1, November 1969 in the Campus Y of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

negotiation, explained that he now regarded the strike as a “demonstration of Black [P]ower instead of a labor dispute,” and viewed the plans for “[B]lack Monday a threat.”¹⁸⁹

As the prospect of a “Black Monday” rally loomed, which the BSM said could bring over three thousand Black high school and college students to Chapel Hill, the University, fearful of a mass display of Black student and worker power, worked with SAGA to settle the strike as quickly as possible. The University also faced national pressure to help move negotiations forward after Ralph Abernathy, the president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, arrived in Chapel Hill on Saturday, December 6th. Abernathy met separately with the striking foodworkers and with Chancellor Sitterson, telling *The Daily Tar Heel* that he “considered the University responsible for settling the strike.”¹⁹⁰ After the University’s administration joined the negotiations, the second strike ended on December 8th, with workers winning several key concessions, including a non-discriminatory clause for employment and promotion, ten days of sick leave per year, the ending of split shifts, and the re-hiring of several dozen laid-off employees.

Despite these victories, the contract signed between SAGA and the workers also included a “no strike, no walkout clause,” significantly limiting foodworkers’ ability to continue to leverage their power through future work stoppages.¹⁹¹ In the afternoon of December 8th, approximately one thousand Black students from across North Carolina met on campus for a “Black Monday” victory rally.¹⁹² “The ‘Message From A Black Man,’ comes through clear to

¹⁸⁹ Al Thomas, “SAGA Seeks Governor’s Help, *The Daily Tar Heel*, 6 December 1969, 1.

¹⁹⁰ Al Thomas, “Abernathy Meets Sitterson, Lee On Strike,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 7 December 1969, 1.

¹⁹¹ Al Thomas, “Strike Ends; Workers Return to Jobs,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, 9 December 1969, 1.

¹⁹² Interview with Ashley Davis by Russ Rymer, 12 April 1974, E-0062.

white society today,” *Black Ink* reported. “YOU CAN’T STOP US NOW.”¹⁹³ The powerful showing of support by North Carolina’s Black students for the foodworkers’ demonstrated the importance of Chapel Hill in state-wide movements for racial justice. But when workers returned to campus in January 1970, SAGA refused to follow through on the promises of the settlement, firing forty-nine more employees in the wake of the second strike, including Elizabeth Brooks.¹⁹⁴ Although the University did not renew their contract with SAGA the following school year, the foodworkers had legally lost their right to strike against SAGA, and the movement for better working conditions for low-wage workers on campus waned through the next decade.

Legacy of Lenoir Hall and Manning Hall

The Foodworkers’ Strikes were characterized by significant student involvement, on the picket lines and, crucially for the documentation of this movement, in the newspapers. Because the Foodworkers’ Strikes occurred contemporaneously with other student movements at the University and elsewhere, including anti-war and Black Power demonstrations, the newspapers at that time focused almost singularly on the involvement of Black students in the strike, characterizing the movement as another form of student unrest during the era of Black Power.¹⁹⁵ But the Foodworkers’ Strikes were above all a movement for Black workers which demonstrated how Black students and, to a lesser extent, white students could support a movement for workers rights at the University, building a Black women-led, multiracial coalition which both contested

¹⁹³ “Brothers Give ‘Message From Black People,’” *Black Ink*, 1.

¹⁹⁴ Brooks was subsequently re-hired, but only after SAGA fired another foodworker, a method they utilized to create dissension between the foodworkers.

¹⁹⁵ Newspaper Clippings in the Campus Y of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records #40126, University Archives, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

the institutional landscape of white supremacy, represented within the space of Lenoir Hall, and created a counter-space in Manning Hall for Black Chapel Hill citizens.

In this way, Black workers challenged the dominant cultural landscape of white supremacy within the institution by refusing to accept the anti-Black policies and processes which sought to extract their labor without regard for their humanity. At few other points in the history of racial justice movements at the University have multiracial coalitions formed between students and workers to support workers rights through racial justice organizing. The housekeepers movement of the 1990s (detailed in the section on the *Cheek-Clark Building*) utilized this working legacy of the Foodworkers' Strikes to create their own movement for racial justice and workers rights. Engaging in counter-storytelling by sharing the history of the Foodworkers' Strikes, the housekeepers movement sought not just to oppose a majoritarian view of the history of the University but also to activate potential student supporters with the powerful story of the successes of the Foodworkers' Strikes.¹⁹⁶

A subsequent shorter-lived workers' movement in 2005 to oppose the outsourcing of the University's dining services to the Aramark corporation also applied the story of the Foodworkers' Strikes to its campaigns. Aramark, which pays its cashiers a wage far below the poverty line for Orange County, continues to oversee the University's dining services.¹⁹⁷ But perhaps most significantly for the national labor movement, during the Foodworkers' Strikes, the state engaged in collective bargaining with the UNC Non-Academic Employees Union and in effect recognized the right of public employees to strike, though North Carolina had been (and

¹⁹⁶ Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso, "Critical race methodology: Counter-storytelling as an analytical framework for education research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, No. 1 (2002): 36.

¹⁹⁷ McKenna Urbanski, "Op-ed: Aramark, associated with Carolina Dining Services, undermines what UNC stands for," *The Daily Tar Heel*, 18 March 2018.

remains) a “right to work” state since 1949, which guarantees that employees can not be compelled to join a union in their workplace.

Despite the Foodworkers’ Strikes’ relevancy for racial justice and workers rights, the movement has never been commemorated by the University. In 2005, the Campaign for Historical Accuracy and Truth organized not just to place a plaque on Lenoir Hall in memory of the strikes but also to honor the leadership of Mary Smith and Elizabeth Brooks. CHAT presented the eponymous Mary Smith-Elizabeth Brooks’ Human Rights Award to Ms. Brooks and Ms. Smith for their “courageous leadership of the 1969 strikes...a victory for racial justice and a much needed reminder to the university that its employees’ dignity and work should not be taken for granted.” Their petition drive requesting that the University honor the strike with “an appropriate public commemorative marker,” which would honor the tremendous legacy of the leaders of that movement, was not recognized by the University’s administrators.¹⁹⁸ Although the Foodworkers’ Strikes were one of the most significant racial and economic justice movements in the institution’s collective memory, the University, by choosing not to recognize the foodworkers’ legacy, sought to silence a crucial chapter in the history of Black freedom striving in Chapel Hill, displaying the institution’s commitment to repressing histories of resistance to anti-Blackness.

Although CHAT was focused singularly on Lenoir Hall as the main site of the Foodworkers’ Strikes, Lenoir Hall and Manning Hall together provide the strongest legacy for the movement as two spaces which illustrate how Black workers, supported by Black students, successfully challenged the anti-Black institutional processes that sought to exclude them from

¹⁹⁸ “Mary Smith Named Human Rights Award Recipient,” Flyer for CHAT, 16 March 2006 in the John Kenyon Chapman Papers #5441, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

the campus and reject Black workers' claims to self-possession. The dual approach of the Foodworkers' Strikes in contesting *and* creating spaces on the campus explains why the movement remains a major touchstone in the crafting of a narrative of Black freedom striving at the University, and points in the direction of the third approach in organizing towards a broader reclamation of the University by Black students and workers. As racial justice campus movements continued to expand, using the dual approach of contestation and creation, the Foodworkers' Strikes endure as an exemplar of how to challenge the cultural hegemony of racial injustice and white supremacy in Chapel Hill.