

Work Left to Do:

The Fight Against Economic Injustice in Austin, Texas, Then and Now

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In Austin, Texas, the economic problems affecting Black people have changed very little since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, when the Austin-based United Political Organization¹ and Travis County Voters League² pushed for advancements like better roads in black neighborhoods. While these two organizations no longer exist, they have been replaced by organizations with a similar objective—such as the Austin Liberation Youth Movement and the Austin Justice Coalition—that continue to agitate for the economic wellbeing of black Austinites. This paper examines the economic goals of the Austin Liberation Youth Movement and the Austin Justice Coalition in the context of the United Political Organization and the Travis County Voters League to illuminate the sluggish economic progress affecting black Austin neighborhoods.

I: A Brief Historical Background

Despite Austin's reputation as a progressive city, the Black Austinites have been at an economic disadvantage since the city's founding in 1839.³ Black people were first brought to Texas in 1528 by the Spanish who claimed ownership over the land. When Mexico declared independence in 1821, it gradually outlawed slavery. Despite this, Anglo settlers in the land that would become Texas continued to force enslaved people to come with them.⁴ During the Texas Revolution of 1835, there were approximately 5,000 enslaved people in Texas. The Texas Constitution of 1836 then strengthened the rights of slaveholders and banished all free black people from Texas in 1840.⁵ Freedmen communities formed after the Civil War have been largely displaced due to a segregate 1928 city plan and subsequent, continued gentrification. The ever-shrinking Black population in Austin is now found mostly in East Austin, where the Austin Liberation Youth Movement and the Austin Justice Coalition attempt to uplift the economic

status of Black Austinites through events like AJC’s Black Food Week⁶ and ALYM’s fundraiser for Eastside Memorial High School’s National Honor Society.⁷

The economic disadvantages experienced by Black Austinites stems from the past. In 1860 there were 1,019 enslaved people in Austin’s population of 3,546. Only 12 Black Austinites were free. After the Civil War, in the 1860s and 1870s, emancipated Black Austinites and Black Texans who had

made their way to Austin founded residential communities such as Masontown, Clarksville, Gregory Town, and Wheatville.

12 such communities were founded, but today the locations of only 9 can be estimated.⁸ Of the 6 with the most discernable bounds from historic records (see fig. 1), only those East of I-35 are still majority Black today

(see fig. 2). This is no accident. In 1928, a city plan proposed that East Austin be designated a “Negro District,” the only area where

municipal services were offered to Black Austinites,⁹ who made up 36% of Austin’s 4,428 citizens at the time.¹⁰ This intentional segregation and displacement of Black populations

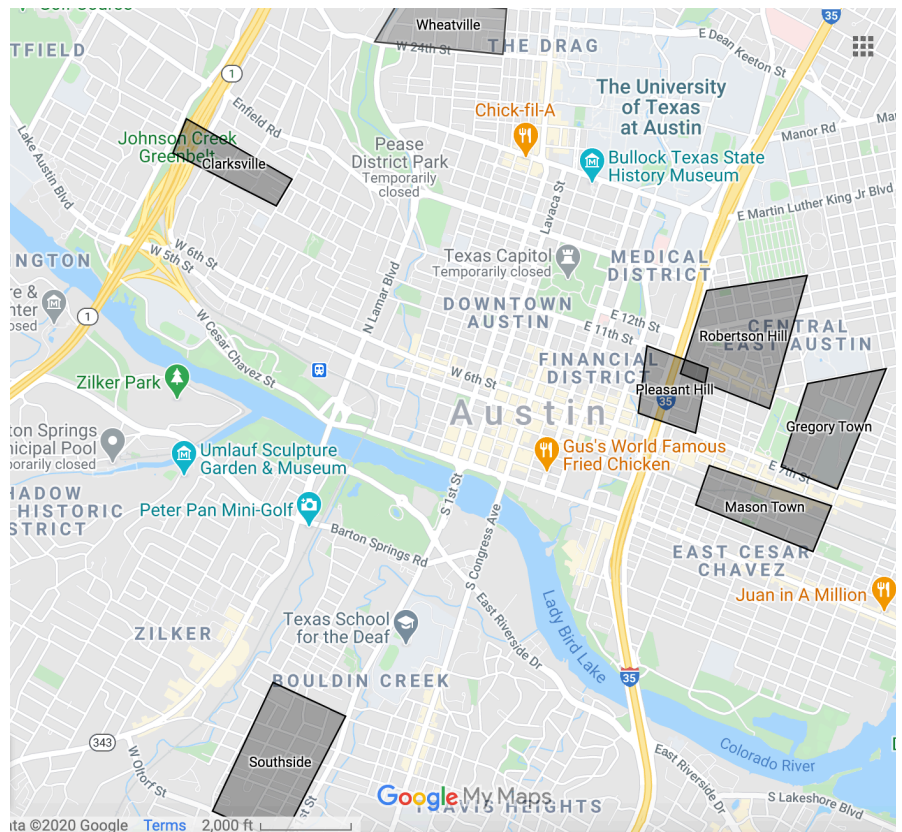


Figure 1: Approximate boundaries of 6 of the 12 freedmen communities founded after the Civil War. This map was created by the author to reflect the locations of the neighborhoods in the context of modern Austin. Pope, John F., and Reuben Ford. *Map of Austin & Surrounding Properties*. Map. Austin: Bergen, Daniel & Gracy Abstract Title Company, 1891. Austin History Center, African American Community Archivist. PDF, <http://austinlibrary.com/ahc/downloads/FreedmanMapOptimized.pdf> (accessed September 27, 2020).

followed the historical trend of the forcible removal of Africans from their land in countries colonized by White countries during the same period.¹¹ I-35 was then constructed in 1940,

creating a solid boundary between White and Black Austinites.¹² The “Negro District,” now referred to as Six Square (see fig. 3), was redlined in 1935, and Black and other minority Austinites living in the area were denied or charged more for goods and

services. Government-backed mortgages were unavailable in

districts that were redlined, so the wealth-building opportunity provided by mortgages was unavailable to Black residents.¹³ While White families in White neighborhoods were able to recover from the Great Depression through government assistance, Black families in Black neighborhoods had no such help. The effects of the government’s willful negligence and continued housing and employment discrimination created the modern economic disparity between White and Black Austinites.

It is important to recognize the ways that social injustices, like segregation, can fall under the wider context of economic injustice. When public facilities are segregated, Black people are denied access to the same free social services to which White people have access. With poorly

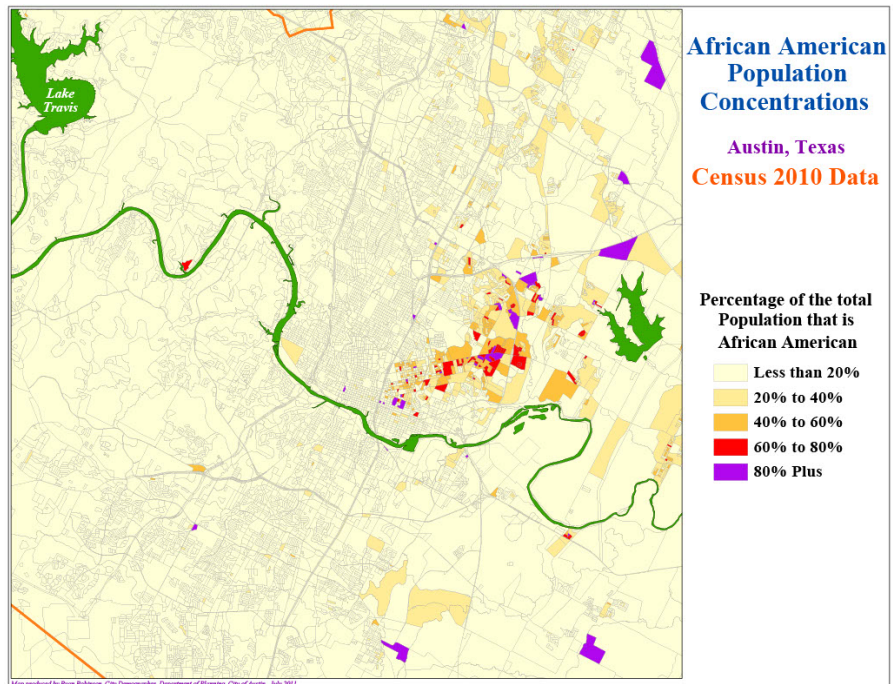


Figure 2: The current areas where black Austinites are concentrated. Robinson, Ryan. *African American Population Concentrations. Map. Austin: City of Austin Government, July 2011. Department of Planning, City of Austin. PDF, https://www.austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Planning/Demographics/african_americans_2010_core_per.pdf (accessed September 29, 2020).*

funded or nonexistent public facilities in Black neighborhoods such as Six Square at its founding, the residents suffered, not just in their quality of life but fiscally, too. Nationally, residents in segregated neighborhoods in the 20th century paid and continue to pay, for the long-

term effects: medical bills when a lack of running trails or public pools compounded with living in a food desert leads to health problems, for instance,¹⁴ or constantly replacing car parts when the city won't pay to repave the roads in Black neighborhoods.¹⁵

Black children in Austin

were and still are forced to go to underfunded, overcrowded schools that can't set them up for success as effectively as the well-funded White schools.¹⁶ ¹⁷ It was in this segregated context that organizations like the Travis County Voters League and the United Political Organization formed in 1945 and 1960 respectively, in pursuit of economic, social, and political justice for Black Austinites.¹⁸ Both groups advocated for Black Austinites and Texans at the city and county levels, arguing for the desegregation of public facilities, the improvement of Six Square's infrastructure, and economic equality for Black residents.

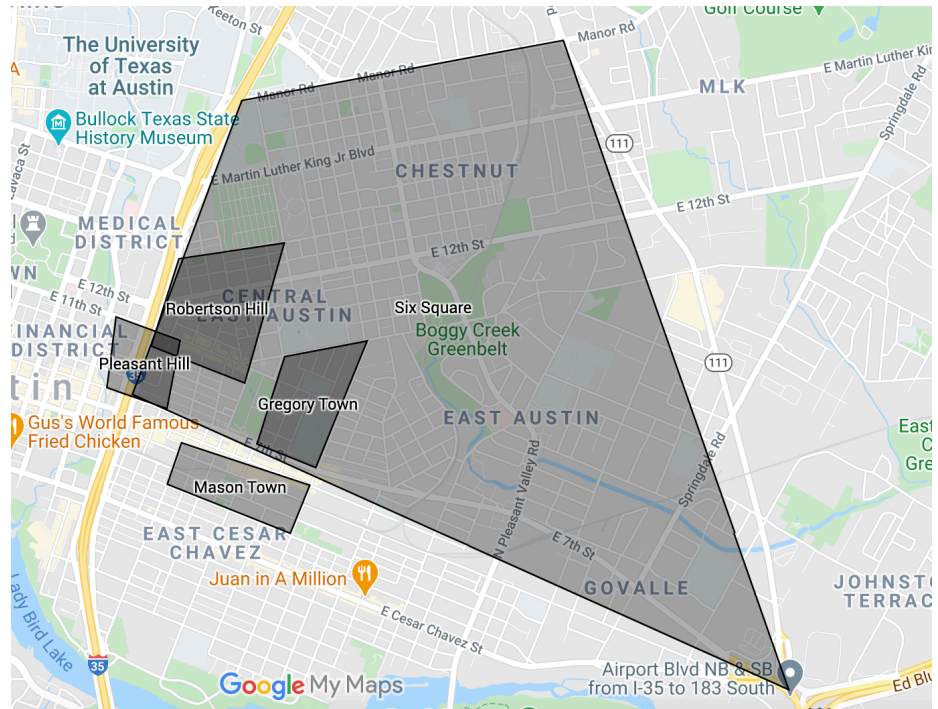


Figure 3: An approximate boundary of Six Square as well as the Black neighborhoods that preceded it in the area, according to the Six Square website. "Home." Six Square. Sixsquare.org, accessed October 1, 2020. <https://www.sixsquare.org/>.

II: The Travis County Voters League and Austin-based United Political Organization

The Travis County Voters League was more liberal than its younger counterpart, and it worked more directly to improve the economic status of Black Austinites. The Voters League held poll tax drives and supported candidates for office that shared their goals. The *Texas Observer* covered a poll tax rally held by the Voters League in 1958 featuring then-Senator Henry Gonzalez, the first Mexican American elected to the Texas Senate who later went on to become a U.S. Congressman.¹⁹ In his speech at the event, Gonzalez spoke about socialism, critiquing “socialism for the plutocrats” and advocating for “socialism for the poor devils.”²⁰ Gonzalez claimed during that rally that he was for “subsidizing all the way around,” raising taxes on the “boy who can pay” rather than the “boy who can’t.”²¹ Gonzalez was supported by the Voters League, so the reasonable assumption can be made that they aligned with his ideas. Socialism for the “poor devils” would certainly aid the economic situations of Black Austinites, and this sentiment echoed what was being said by Black civil rights leaders on a national level: Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton argued that “capitalist exploitation” of Black Americans was directly linked to Black poverty and oppression.²² The Voters League clearly believed in equitable government funding toward public projects in Six Square compared to the rest of the city, just as they had during the four years leading up to the drive, as they fought for the creation of the East Austin Development Committee.

The Travis County Voters League proposed the East Austin Development Committee with the goal to improve the neighborhood and facilities in Six Square. In 1954, the Voters League attended two Austin City Council meetings just fourteen days apart, advocating for the committee²³ and a further Advisory Committee on Slum Eradication.²⁴ The Council did not meet the request of Rev. Harold T. Branch, the organization’s president, to establish the committee within 10 days,²⁵ so the League returned to ask again. The League’s representative for the second

meeting, Arthur DeWitty (see fig. 4), brought along two representatives, one for the local churches and one for the City Federation of Women's Clubs, who supported the League's proposal.²⁶ Their efforts yielded results, and the committee was formed. Not long after, however, the legality of the program was questioned, and the Texas Legislature curbed the abilities of the committee to do its job by making all potential urban renewal only possible with the approval of the voters in May of 1957. Further legal disputes prevented the first meeting of the committee, at that point referred to as the Urban Renewal Agency, from meeting until July of 1962.²⁷ One of the League's goals were reached, though it took eight years instead of 10 days. The slow-moving progress of reform, however, did not deter the League or Arthur DeWitty.

Arthur DeWitty was the secretary of the Travis County Voters League at its inception and fought for economic justice for Black Austinites throughout his life, eventually becoming the president of the local NAACP chapter.²⁸ In 1949,

DeWitty visited the Austin City Council to protest the discrimination by the Federal Housing Administration that prevented Black Austinites in East Austin from getting insured loans at the same low rates that White Austinites in West Austin enjoyed.²⁹ This discriminatory practice prevented many Black Austinites from owning homes rather than renting, creating a barrier to building generational wealth. While DeWitty was not successful, his attempt reflects the national

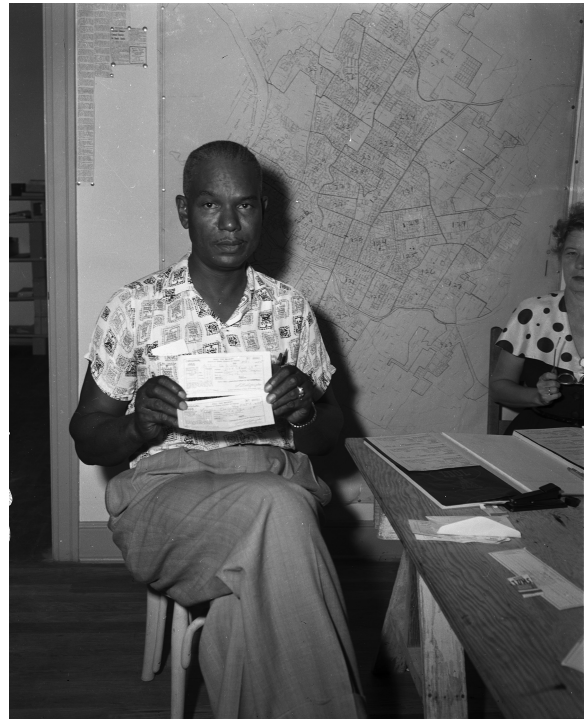


Figure 4: Arthur DeWitty at a poll tax drive. Texas AFL-CIO Executive Board Office Records, University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, "Arthur DeWitty, poll tax drive in Austin, Texas," UTA Libraries Digital Gallery, 1955, accessed October 2, 2020. <https://library.uta.edu/digitalgallery/img/10013420>

struggle faced by Black Americans due to discrimination by the FHA.³⁰ DeWitty was involved in the successful effort to desegregate “parks, libraries, and other municipal facilities,”³¹ allowing Black Austinites the opportunity to benefit from the same government services as White Austinites. This, according to DeWitty, was part of the Travis County Voters League’s goal to integrate all public facilities.³² As discussed earlier, the integration of public facilities was to the economic benefit of Black Austinites and not simply a social issue. Arthur DeWitty was a prominent figure in improving the economic status of Black Austinites through his work with the Travis County Voters League and, later, the NAACP.

The United Political Organization was formed in 1960, in part by former members of the Travis County Voters League, to advance the “employment and voting rights”³³ of Black and Latinx Austinites through organizing a voting bloc powerful enough to influence the platforms of Austin politicians.³⁴ The U.P.O. aimed to uplift the economic status of Black Austinites through making jobs more accessible to them, and this sometimes put them at odds with the League over which candidates could best aid their cause. The differences and similarities between the U.P.O. and the League are best highlighted through examining two of the candidates the organization supported and denounced.

In 1962, the U.P.O. and the Travis County Voters League were at odds over which gubernatorial candidate should win the Democratic primary. The U.P.O. played a large part in securing the Black Austin vote for John Connally instead of the League’s candidate, Don Yarborough.³⁵ In a contemporary newspaper article, Don Yarborough was characterized as a candidate beloved by “liberal extremists” who could potentially introduce a state income tax that would “doom” industrial expansion and stunt employment opportunities.³⁶ U.P.O.’s support of John Connally as opposed to Don Yarborough implies that group leaned further right politically

than the League. This is not surprising, as the U.P.O. was considered “middle class,” to a greater extent than the League.³⁷ One of the organization’s founders, M.J. Anderson, was considered to be the wealthiest Black man in Austin.³⁸ While Yarborough’s pro-union status might be considered more advantageous for Black workers, Connally’s platform claimed that “industrial expansion” would bring jobs “by the thousands” under his leadership.³⁹ The U.P.O. was not the most left-leaning organization fighting for Black rights, but they supported and campaigned for candidates they thought would improve the Black economic condition.

In the 1963 Austin City Council election, political ads for candidate Otto Mittag railed against the U.P.O. for being “radical,” “reactionary,” and “extreme left-wing.”⁴⁰ This was in response to the U.P.O. not supporting Mittag’s bid for City Council. Mittag put out several such ads complaining about the U.P.O. and bloc voting, which he called “backroom shenanigans” and a “pressure tactic.”⁴¹ Mittag identified as an independent candidate and a “dedicated advocate of free enterprise,”⁴² who thought that crime, traffic, and taxes were the biggest problems facing Austin.⁴³ He also thought that the police force deserved “attractive salaries” while other candidates were pushing for raising salaries for nurses and sanitation workers.⁴⁴ Since the U.P.O. did not endorse Mittag’s platform, it hints at what the U.P.O. did believe in. The organization did not support Yarborough’s potential introduction of a state income tax, so it’s unlikely that the U.P.O. disagreed with Mittag’s stance on taxes. It’s more likely that the U.P.O. disagreed with Mittag’s stance on crime: on a national level in 1960, Black men were five times as likely as White men to be incarcerated.⁴⁵ Previously incarcerated people are 15-30% less likely to be employed than those who haven’t been incarcerated, and the overrepresentation of Black people in prison accounts for 1/3 of the national employment gap between Black and white men according to studies done in the early 1990s.⁴⁶ The mass incarceration of Black people, therefore,

perpetuates the cycle of poverty in Black neighborhoods, and Austin was and is no exception. Perhaps the U.P.O. disagreed with Mittag's proposal to further support and expand the police presence in Six Square. It's also possible that Mittag's personal prejudices lost him the support of the U.P.O.—he was arrested for assaulting protestors demonstrating against racism in 1968, though he was later acquitted⁴⁷—but with the few records remaining of the U.P.O. it's difficult to know for sure. Regardless, through the U.P.O.'s disapproval of Mittag it can be ascertained that while they were politically to the right of the Travis County Voters League, they were still to the left of the Independent Otto Mittag.

The difference in leadership between the Travis County Voters League and the United Political Organization can help explain the differences in their political leanings. The U.P.O. was led by influential, wealthy Black Austinites, while the League was led by middle class Black Austinites: DeWitty was a retiree, previously the chief cook for a department store,⁴⁸ and Rev. Branch was a reverend for the East 19th Street Baptist Church in Six Square.⁴⁹ In turn, the U.P.O. focused on building and protecting Black wealth, through supporting candidates who wouldn't raise taxes and would create new jobs, while the League focused on integrating public amenities to alleviate the pressure on Black Austinites living in poverty or just getting by. The organizations had similar approaches to achieving those objectives, both focusing on building voting blocs to demand the attention of civic leaders. While the U.P.O. and the League are no longer active, The Austin Justice Coalition and the Austin Liberation Youth Movement have taken up their mantle and are working to achieve their goals in the same ways. While the U.P.O. and the League, and now their successors, did not and do not agree on everything, they all share the similar goal of economic justice for Black Austinites.

III: Austin Liberation Youth Movement and the Austin Justice Coalition

The Austin Justice Coalition is older than the Austin Liberation Youth Movement, having been founded in 2015, and it “focuses on improving the quality of life for people who are Black, Brown, and poor.”⁵⁰ Much like the Travis County Voters’ League used its power as a voting bloc to advocate for the East Austin Development Committee, the Austin Justice Coalition claims that influence over local government and advocacy for policy reform are the methods through which the organization achieves its goals.⁵¹ AJC was founded by Chas Moore, now the current Executive Director, and is run by eight other people besides Moore, including Ishia Lynette, an AJC board member, the Social Media Manager, and the Community Service Director.⁵² “One of [AJC’s] biggest goals is community power. It takes a very big village... to make change, especially in something that is deep rooted as systematic racism,”⁵³ according to Lynette. As a well-known presence in Austin, AJC has plenty of name recognition to aid the building of its village.

AJC attempts to address the economic inequality facing Black and Brown Austinites through its events, holding book clubs and movie screenings that deal with economic inequality⁵⁴ as well as hosting its annual Black Food Week.⁵⁵ of the 7.7% of the population that is Black in Austin, the homeownership rate is only 32%, the lowest of any race in Austin. The Latinx homeownership rate is 35%. Properties owned by Black and Latinx Austinites are statistically worth less than properties owned by White and Asian Austinites, at an average value of \$170,000 versus \$340,000.⁵⁶ This wealth gap has remained stark in Austin, despite the hard work of the U.P.O. and the League. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson⁵⁷ (interestingly, born less than an hour and a half West of what would become Six Square⁵⁸), but discrimination in employment and housing continued in Austin.⁵⁹ Today, most economic opportunities are located in West Austin, and gentrification, an ongoing

problem, has pushed Black families out of East Austin through climbing costs of living.⁶⁰ As of 2017, Black people made up only 7.7% of the population, compared to the 47.7% of the population made up by non-Latino Whites.⁶¹ Black Austinites are still adversely affected by the economic legacy left by the segregation of the 1928 city plan. AJC is aware of the repercussions of unequal access to services and unemployment, as evidenced by the events they host for education and to address these issues.

AJC also protests against police violence, calling for reforms of the Austin Police Department initially and now the defunding of APD and the firing of Police Chief Manley,⁶² which, with the understanding that modern policing is an extension of modern-day slavery equivalent in the form of the prison industrial complex,⁶³ is both a social and economic goal. “...We are no longer, at least physically treated like slaves... but in the way that society views Black Americans, for me, it went from a physical slavery to mental slavery... now it's more about resources and access,” Lynette said, “They've... figured out how to keep us slaves without having to treat us in that same manner and have us basically do free labor as property.”⁶⁴ Mass incarceration of Black and Latinx people in Texas is a huge issue. Texas has an incarceration rate of 891 per 100,000 people, which is higher than that of the U.S. national average and every founding NATO country. Black men are overrepresented in Texas prisons as well, making up 12% of the Texas population but 33% of the Texas prison population as of 2010.⁶⁵ The “sprawling carceral state”⁶⁶ is intentional, for as well having the largest prison population in the United States, Texas is one of four states where inmates are not paid for their labor.⁶⁷ This labor, managed by Texas Correctional Industries, generates \$88.9 million a year in revenue as of 2014.⁶⁸ The size of the Texas prison population and the money generated through hardly seems coincidental. AJC’s participation in the movement to defund the police shows its commitment to

improving the lives of Black and Brown Austinites, both through the immediate danger police pose to people of color and the economic threat of the prison industrial complex.

According to Lynette, AJC takes a community-based, grassroots approach to its goals. “I think a lot of times from the outside people think that AJC just tends to live in this higher realm, but it's very much a community thing for us,” Lynette said.⁶⁹ While the economic issues that face Black Austinites are largely systemic, AJC believes they can still be combatted through community organizing. “People need to know that community starts within you,” Lynette said. “So if that's in your neighborhood, you walk around and say, ‘Hey, on Saturdays, every other two weeks, we're going to do a homeless drive,’ or ‘Hey, every three weeks, I'm going to have a cooking class,’ whatever you can do to provide community.”⁷⁰ AJC still involves itself with politics that influence the economic prosperity of Black and Brown Austinites, however, engaging the Austin Independent School District School Board over school closures⁷¹ and the City Council over land development codes,⁷² for example. This multi-pronged approach is an attempt to create change both directly and systemically.

AJC works with other civil rights organizations in Austin, though they may differ in their approaches and goals. Much like the Travis County Voters’ League and the United Political Organization did not agree on all counts, AJC’s path to racial equity does not necessarily agree with the path envisioned by the Austin Liberation Youth Movement. “We may not all align with how we get to them to the end point, which is obviously to eliminate systematic racism, or racism in general, but we can all agree that it has to be done in some way,” Lynette said.⁷³ Lynette believes, however, that disagreements between the organizations in goals and methods are helpful, not harmful, to the movement. “We're not going to have all the answers as groups to get to where we need to be,” Lynette said. “But... I wholeheartedly know that what we want to

happen, as far as... ending racism and making it a more just world for Black Americans, I'm sure most groups can align with that, and just because we don't see eye to eye on how to get there doesn't mean that we should be put against each other, nor should we be enemies... It's helpful. It's just attacking the system in different ways.”⁷⁴ This idea can be applied to national trends of disagreements between civil rights organizations: in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, the Student Nonviolence Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference did not always agree on methods, for instance, but still worked together toward the same goal.⁷⁵ Though the opposition may use these disagreements as an opportunity to sow discord, according to Lynette, they are actually opportunities.

Aaron Booe, co-founder of the Austin Liberation Youth Movement, agrees with Lynette that different approaches among organizations is not necessarily a bad thing. “That's one of our greatest strengths as an organization, working with each other, regardless of whether or not we agree with each other's fundamental guiding ideologies, because at the end of the day, we are all a united public force that wants the private power of Austin to be afraid of us,” Booe said.⁷⁶ ALYM, a relatively new organization that was founded in 2020, is “student-led group of radical progressives who are fighting to implement and enforce revolutionary change in Austin, Texas.”⁷⁷ ALYM has already begun its work toward Black equity, hosting a march and rally on July 11th, 2020,⁷⁸ a fundraiser for Eastside Memorial High School National Honor Society,⁷⁹ and a back-to-school drive.⁸⁰ According to Booe, “ALYM is a very community-oriented group because we care about our communities and we believe that real and transformative change, real revolution... can only start in the municipality.”⁸¹ The key difference between ALYM and AJC is their emphasis on revolution versus reform, respectively.⁸²

ALYM considers economic disparity to be the most pressing issue facing Black Austinites. ALYM focuses “on the economic side because... we see these really brilliant advancements in terms of political rights,” Booe said. “But unless you have economic rights that are on par with the political rights you achieve, nothing has changed.”⁸³ The legacy of segregation in Austin has left Black Austinites at an economic disadvantage. According to Booe, segregation meant that “Black people were not only exploited politically by the establishment, we were also prevented from partaking in the economic activity that was going on in a lot of the country.”⁸⁴ This is evidenced by the creation of Six Square and the lack of resources provided to the neighborhood, circumstances both the Travis County Voters’ League and the United Political Organization attempted to improve. Despite their attempts, ALYM and AJC are both fighting the same battle. The economic condition of Black Austinites has not improved, and if anything has worsened: gentrification has left the population dwindling, according to Booe, who thinks “that gentrification represents a particular challenge to the black community, and that is directly related to capitalism.”⁸⁵ Booe continues to say that “a lot of the people we see moving into low income black and brown communities are these like more affluent, white, cosmopolitan types, who are basically complicit in the exploitation of black people by forcing them out of their homes that they already worked so hard to acquire.”⁸⁶ As discussed earlier, the unavailability of FHA-insured loans for Black Austinites living in Six Square created a barrier to generational wealth which has gone unrectified and laid the groundwork for the gentrification of East Austin. Black Austinites have gone from 36%⁸⁷ of the population to just 7.7%.⁸⁸

Despite its revolutionary aspirations, ALYM is aware of its own limitations and is focused on ground-level change in the Austin community. ALYM is “very community focused,” Booe said. “Most of our programs and our promises, the people are about reinvesting in

communities.”⁸⁹ Despite its reticence to work within the system, ALYM still takes advantage of local politics, and recognizes the usefulness of politics to create change in the current moment. Booe looks at politics “as a chance to reinvest in our communities.”⁹⁰ ALYM’s goal is to “build a very diverse and very, very powerful coalition of people who can demand the real kind of change that we all deserve,” according to Booe.⁹¹ This coalition building is intrinsic to AJC and was intrinsic to the League and the U.P.O. as well. Booe said that “the best way to enact change is to build the sort of popular movement that can make power work around you,” a belief that seems to be or have been shared by all four organizations. In the context of American democracy, bloc organizing matters. Through concentrating its efforts in Austin, ALYM and AJC believe that they can influence real economic change at a local level.

Many of the ways ALYM has started outreach has been economic, such as the aforementioned fundraiser and back-to-school drive, with the understanding that racism is intrinsically related to class, according to Booe. “When [liberals] recognize how systemic racism is in America, their understanding stops at the intersection of race and class,” Booe said. “... Because we don't see a lot of anticapitalism in politics from the masses, I don't really think we can expect to see people gain a better understanding of racism, because I don't think we can analyze racism without understanding its direct relation to capitalism.”⁹² This further supports the idea that without economic change, little progress can be made to improve the conditions of Black and Brown Austinites. ALYM’s outreach efforts have been an attempt to directly improve the lives of Black and Brown Austinites, all while building a voting bloc to create economic change at a political level. Booe believes that “racism is a function of capitalism... [and] is very much reliant on the exploitation of black bodies.”⁹³ This is a national trend, as capitalism has a “disproportionate impact on Black America.”⁹⁴ Since ALYM is a grassroots organization,

overturning the current economic system in America is not a reasonable goal, but its programs to improve the economic condition of Black and Brown Austinites are a result of the organization's understanding that positive change in the conditions for Black Austinites is not independent of economic improvement.

While AJC and ALYM are different in many ways, their overarching goal is the same. Both organizations are fighting to improve the conditions under which Black Austinites live. They are not the only organizations in Austin to pursue this goal, though they have been the contemporary focus of this paper due its constraints. The anti-capitalist Star Power BlacKollective, for instance, hosts protests⁹⁵ and released a podcast, a zine, and merchandise related to Black liberation on November 27, 2020.⁹⁶ The controversy-mired Mike Ramos Brigade, named after a man killed by the Austin Police Department on April 24, 2020,⁹⁷ though without the permission of Ramos' mother due to their militant nature,⁹⁸ shines a spotlight on APD violence. The NAACP has a chapter in Austin.⁹⁹ ALYM and AJC are far from alone, nor is the movement a monolith. AJC and ALYM disagree explicitly in the appropriateness of interacting with APD, for instance. AJC is willing to engage in police reform talks while ALYM hosted an event called The People's Tribunal in front of City Hall, where they prosecuted the City of Austin and the Austin Police Department in a mock trial for "anti-immigration policies, [the] underfunding of public health in Austin, police brutality, and community/housing displacement/gentrification," complete with a guillotine.¹⁰⁰ As both Booe and Lynette said, however, these differences can help to strengthen the movement, not fracture it.

IV: Conclusion

Austin is a city that takes pride in its “liberal” identity,¹⁰¹ where many would balk at overt racism, but little work is done to aid economic progress for Black Austinites. The unremedied economic disparity in Austin is a form of covert racism, harmful negligence at best, willful exploitation at worst. The need for organizations like ALYM and AJC has not decreased over the years: in fact, their prevalence has increased, which is evidence that little has changed for Black Austinites.

The economic disparity faced by Black Austinites is not unique. Instead, it follows a national trend.¹⁰² Austin provides a key example of why cities with liberal policies and governance cannot be excluded from scrutiny in anti-racist movements. Through Austin it also becomes clear that economics are intrinsically tied to racism, for while segregation is no longer codified, the ramifications of segregation and the racist economic policies in Austin’s history still resonate in Black Austin today. The Austin Justice Coalition and the Austin Liberation Youth Movement continue the work of the Travis County Voters League and the United Political Organization because there is still much work to be done.

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- ² "Voters League Meets Tonight," *The Austin Statesman (1921-1973)*, Jul 26, 1956.
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- ²⁰ R.D., "Poll Tax, Hymns, and Henry." *Texas Observer*, January 24, 1958.
- ²¹ Ibid.
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