

cadre under the age of twenty. Not only were the Des Moines recruits young, but most of them were drawn from the ranks of recent high school graduates, students, working-class, and impoverished African Americans.<sup>10</sup> However, other members like Clive DePatton were children of the black middle class in Des Moines. DePatton's father, Hobart, owned several small businesses in the Center Street and University Street area until the property was confiscated through eminent domain by the city of Des Moines.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the average educational level of the membership was rather limited. Although the founder, Mary Rem, had finished high school, and the Deputy of Education, Charles Knox, had attended college, many of the rank-and-file activists were high school dropouts.<sup>12</sup>

The Des Moines chapter required that its members either work or attend school in order to learn the needs of the people and understand where they lived and worked. In the minds of the Iowa leadership, since members had to get up early in the morning to participate in programs for the community, the work or school requirement attracted only the most dedicated individuals to the Des Moines BPP. According to Andre Rawls, Kansas City chapter member, the Black Panther Party was neither "a social organization" nor "a political organization in the sense of American . . . politics"; rather, it was a way of life:

You would have us getting up at 5:00 in the morning to get the kids fed then give them whatever job, whatever school task we had, come back in the evening, go out into the community, politicize, sell newspapers, do political education classes, and end our day at about midnight. It was a way of living. It is very difficult sometimes to get people to understand that the Black Panther Party was not a social organization, nor was it a political organization in the sense of American electoral politics. But it was a military revolutionary organization that you actually lived in.<sup>13</sup>

Since the majority of the members were young people, the discontent of black students was an important part of the chapter's agenda. The quality of education that blacks received in the Des Moines public school system was poor. Eventually black students—led by Edward Smith, president of the Black Committee for Student Power, and following the BPP directives—presented sixteen wide-ranging demands to the school board.<sup>14</sup> According to the *Des Moines Register*, these demands included the following: (1) Have black teachers teach African–African American history; (2) instruct students about the true fighting history of minorities and poor

whites; (3) establish community control boards; (4) hire more black teachers; (5) refer to students as African American or black rather than Negro; (6) involve students in the decision-making process; (7) include minorities on Student Councils; (8) reevaluate the Department of Pupil Services; (9) eliminate the Tracking System; (10) inform all students of available scholarships regardless of academic standing; (11) remove racist teachers; (12) overhaul teacher in-service training; (13) provide greater academic freedom; (14) give teachers a decision-making role in education; (15) allow students with voting power to be on the school board; and (16) do not release information about students without their consent.<sup>15</sup>

According to Knox, "Some of those young people went to jail for staging that kind of sit-in. But, it was worth it because in the end you got the teachers with a union. And the teachers in Des Moines should be thanking those students right now."<sup>16</sup> The black students were supported by a handful of white students. For example, a white student, Robert Wallace, said, "many White students back their Black brothers and sisters 100 percent." However, the increased militancy of the black students attracted a backlash in certain sections of Des Moines's white community. According to the *Des Moines Register*, when the segregationist governor of Alabama, George Wallace, visited the Midwest in October 1968, on his campaign for the presidency, enthusiastic, large white crowds greeted his arrival.<sup>17</sup>

Charles Knox proved instrumental in helping the Panthers mobilize resources. In line with that, the Des Moines branch secured the use of a house in the local community that was owned by the Catholic Church with the promise to use the facility to help the local black population. Charles Knox explains how he challenged and persuaded the BPP chapter to consider this offer:

That's when I posed the question to them: "If they were serious about organizing, if you are serious lets go get this house from these Catholics." That's how we started. And when we got the house it was amazing because they didn't think it was going to happen. I did the pre-negotiation for the house. You know, telling the people if they were serious they would let the young folks come on in and let us take it and run it.

Once he secured an office for the chapter, Knox focused on political education for the membership. Cadres were instructed in the BPP's theoretical terminology but were also instructed on how to adapt theory to the practical everyday reality for midwestern blacks. All members were