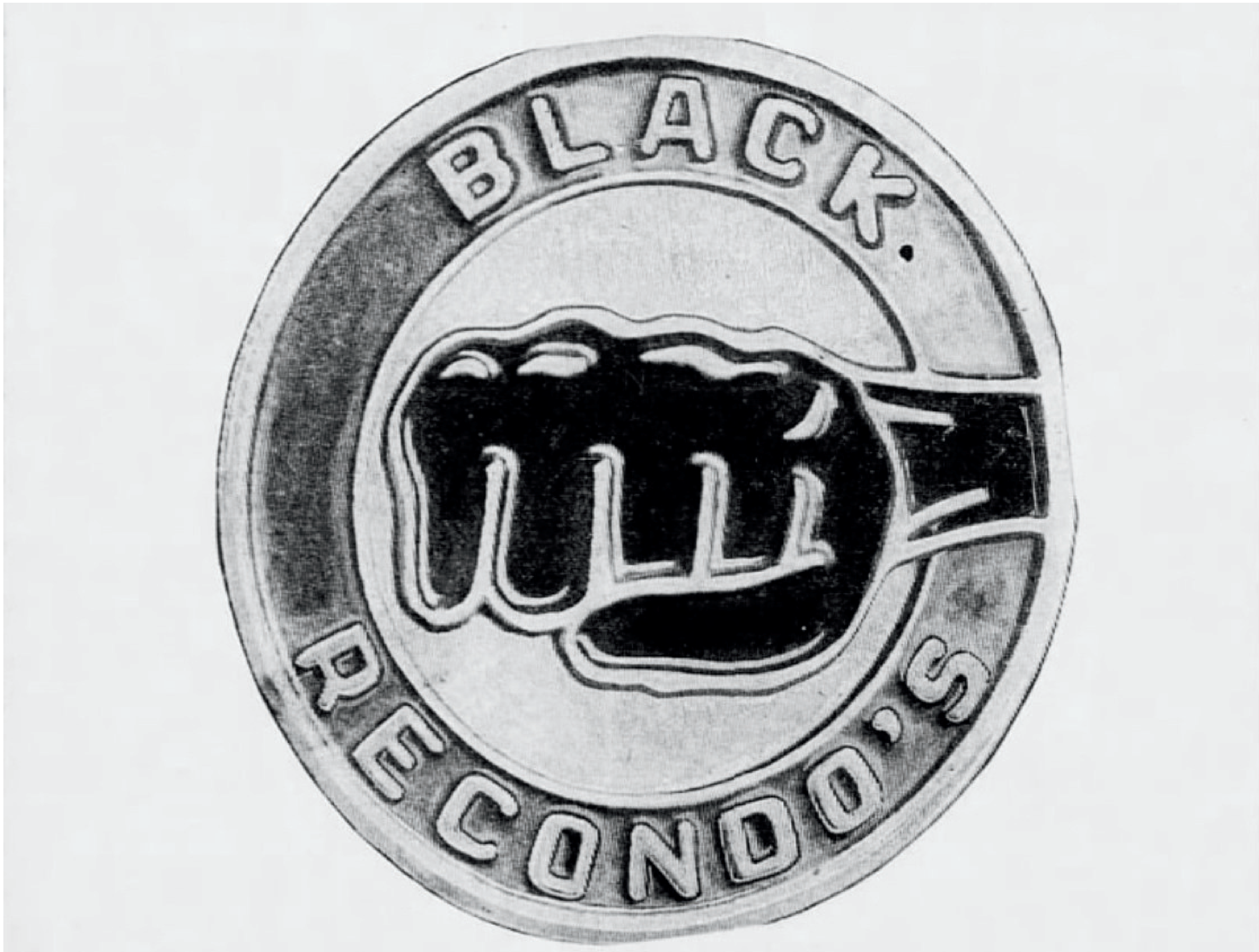


# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



### THE BLACK RECONDOS: PROMOTING UNITY

The Black Recondos, formed in Battle Creek in the late 1960s, emerged as a symbol of solidarity during the Civil Rights era. Originating from the Youth Adult Force, a group of concerned citizens in collaboration with the local police department, their mission was to serve as civilian peacekeepers.

The name "Black Recondos" paid homage to the elite U.S. Army unit, the Recondos, known for their operations behind enemy lines. In a 1971 Battle Creek Enquirer interview, William Boards, one of the group's consultants, stated their diverse membership of 70 people included 15 women, eight of whom were white, and 15 white men, along with members of the Mexican American community. The badge of the Black Recondos, depicted here, symbolizes unity.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



### **BLACK RECONDOS: GUARDIANS OF COMMUNITY PEACE**

From the late '60s to the early '70s, the Black Recondos left an indelible mark on the city. Whether walking the halls of Battle Creek Central or patrolling neighborhood streets, they brought a calming influence to what was sometimes a restless community.

Their success was attributed to respected members and consultants such as Mayor Fredrick M. Brydges, Police Chief Clifford D. Barney, mortician Louis T. Perry, and Battle Creek Schools' superintendent, Harry R. Davidson. But it was the scores of committed people working at the grassroots level that made their work so impactful. Pictured are three Black Recondos assigned to positively interact with youth at the high school.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



*YAC's Troubleshooters*

### **NAACP YOUNG ADULT COUNCIL: ADVOCATES FOR EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY**

In 1968, the NAACP Young Adult Council (YAC), among other activities, advocated for the hiring of Black educators and administrative personnel at Battle Creek Public Schools. It was a move that changed the course of education, allowing Black students to more equitably “see” themselves in their teachers. In turn, it helped stabilize what had previously been a growingly volatile environment, owing to racial tensions.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



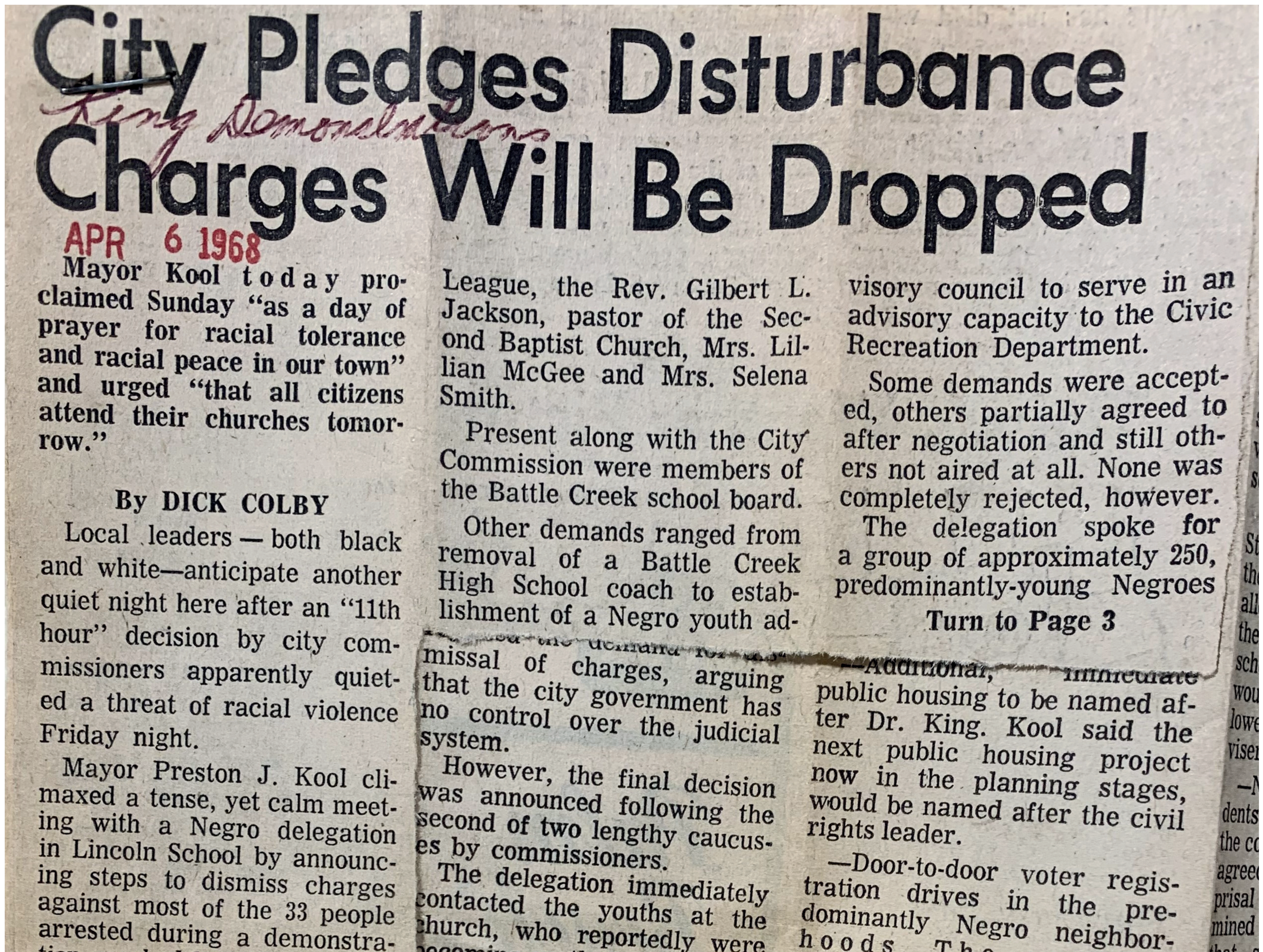
### DR. KING'S VISIT TO BATTLE CREEK: AN HISTORIC SERMON

Less than a week after his brother's arrest in 1960, during a sit-in at a segregated cafeteria in Atlanta, Dr. King traveled to Battle Creek where he reprised his sermon titled "Paul's Letter to American Christians" at First United Methodist Church. It was the only time he visited the city. Pictured with Dr. King, as he greeted residents, are Dr. David Evans, Reverend Sidney Short, and Reverend Paul Bigby.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## YAC PROTESTS DR. KING'S ASSASSINATION: A PEACEFUL STAND

During his 1960 sermon at First United Methodist Church, Dr. King said, "It may mean going to jail, but we will go to jail with a smile. Some will face physical death before the struggle is won, but it is the price that some must pay."

Those words proved to be prophetic when, after his assassination in 1968, members of the Battle Creek NAACP Young Adult Council were arrested during a peaceful street demonstration that temporarily blocked the downtown intersection of Jackson and Capital Avenue. Charges were eventually dropped but memories of the incident remain. Among the protesters was Linda Prather Lane, who is featured in the 2024 "Battle Creek Did Not Burn" documentary. This article, from the Battle Creek Enquirer chronicles some of the demands YAC and other community members made.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



### **HAVEN FOR BLACK SOLDIERS: HAMBLIN USO CLUB**

The Hamblin USO Club served as a gathering place for African American soldiers stationed at Fort Custer during World War II. Located at 242 Hamblin Ave., this club, built in 1942 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, held dances and other entertainment events, and once hosted heavyweight boxing champion Joe Lewis.

After the war, the club became the Hamblin Community Center, playing a vital cultural and social role in the city's Black community.




# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



*Community Groups Organized to assist  
Hamblin USO Club*



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**Committee of Management**


CHAIRMAN ..... DR. C. L. EVANS  
 VICE-CHAIRMAN ..... REV. E. L. TODD  
 SECRETARY ..... ATTY. JAMES R. GOLDEN  
 TREASURER ..... REV. EDWARD B. WILLIAMS

Mr. Earl Anderson, Rev. N. Dan Braby, Atty. Edwin D. Brown, Mrs. Ellen Bland, Mrs. Henrietta Johns, Major Theophilus Mann and William H. Childs.

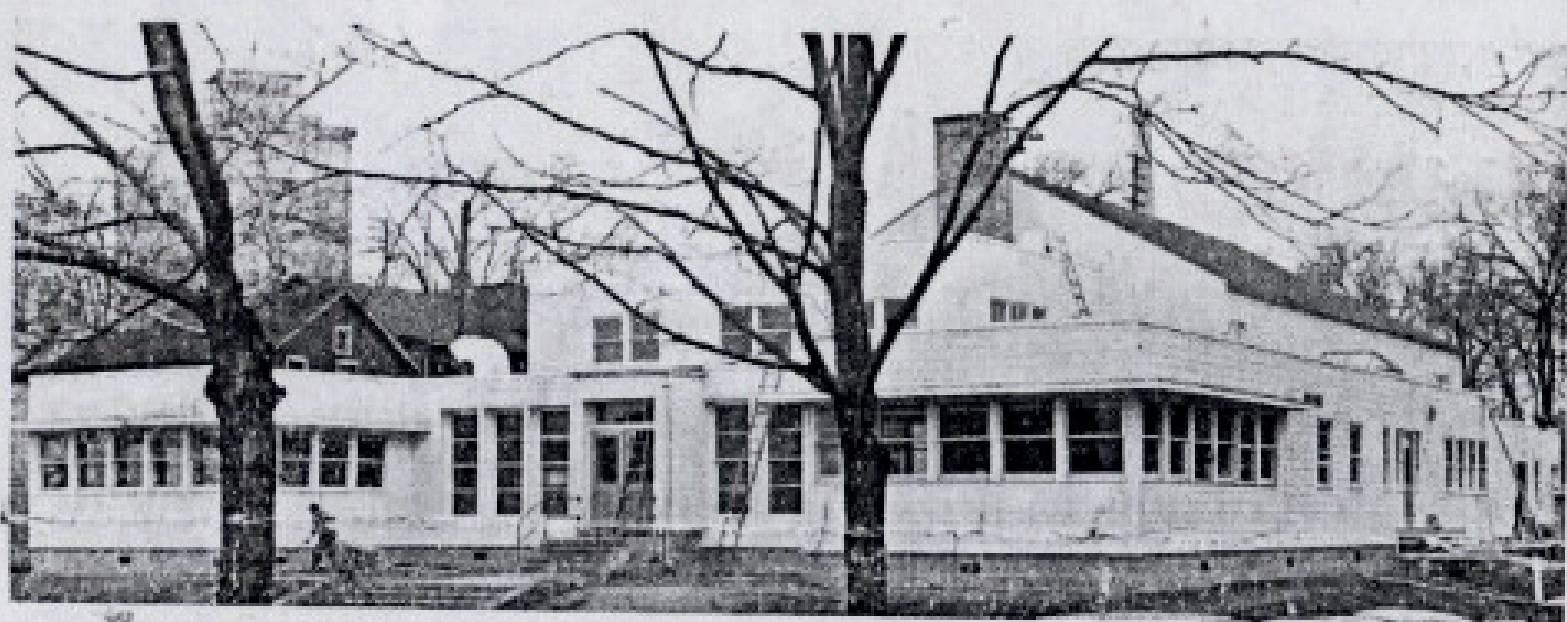
<p><b>Women's Auxiliary</b></p> <p>Mrs. Nellie Lane ..... <i>President</i>                  Mrs. Mae Guy ..... <i>Secretary</i>                  Mrs. Sarah Milner ..... <i>Treasurer</i></p> <p><b>Girls' Committee</b></p> <p>Mrs. Alva Walston ..... <i>President</i>                  Mrs. Mattie Willis ..... <i>Secretary</i>                  Mrs. Irene Jackson ..... <i>Treasurer</i></p> <p><b>Girls' Service Organization</b></p> <p>Miss Alice Grant ..... <i>President</i>                  Miss Gertrude Easley ..... <i>Vice-President</i>                  Miss Alma Miller ..... <i>Secretary</i>                  Miss Lena Collins ..... <i>Treasurer</i></p> <p>Hostess Club of 112</p>	<p><b>Girls' Service Organization</b></p> <p>Miss Thelma Silence ..... <i>President</i>                  Miss Berta Lee Hayes ..... <i>Secretary</i>                  Miss Fannie Price ..... <i>Treasurer</i></p> <p><b>Silver Dollar Club</b></p> <p>Matthew Woods ..... <i>President</i>                  Percy Henderson ..... <i>Secretary</i>                  Paul Wells ..... <i>Treasurer</i></p> <p><b>Staff</b></p> <p>William H. Childs ..... <i>Director</i>                  Verneta E. Hill ..... <i>Asst. Director</i>                  Thomas F. Johnson ..... <i>Asst. Director</i>                  Frances I. Valentine ..... <i>Office</i>                  J. Claire Griffin ..... <i>Custodian</i></p> <p>Men's Committee of 100</p>
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Clifton J. Woods, Chairman, 1941 USO Campaign

*The Young Men's Christian Associations — The National Catholic Community Service — The Salvation Army — The Young Women's Christian Associations  
 The Jewish Welfare Board — The National Travelers Aid Association*

United Service Organizations  For National Defense, Inc

### Grand Opening Program



One of the typical USO buildings being opened this month

DR. C. L. EVANS, Chairman  
Hamblin USO Committee of Management, officiating

*Saturday, January 24, 1942*

8:00 P. M.

242 HAMBLIN AVE.                      BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN

## HAMBLIN COMMUNITY CENTER: BLACK COMMUNITY HUB

Following World War II, the City of Battle Creek purchased the Hamblin USO Club, renaming it the Hamblin Community Center. It hosted a wide range of social activities, from dances and basketball games to roller skating, talent shows, and educational classes in music, photography, and cooking for the city's young Black population.

In the evenings, it transformed into a social gathering place for adults and also hosted NAACP meetings. The location was second to none, in terms of its profound impact on Black culture in the city and served as a hub for a variety of nearby Black-owned businesses.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## PROMOTING YOUNG ATHLETES

The Hamblin Community Center featured a girls' basketball team, fostering sportsmanship and empowerment among its members. Among the young women pictured are Shirley Pierce, Mary Alice Collins, Sandra Smith, Anna Patton, Deloris Harvey, and Shirley McLiechy.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



### LES DAMES SOCIAL CLUB

Les Dames Social Club was one of the many Black organizations that hosted events at the Hamblin Center. This and other clubs and organizations offered culturally enriching interaction in a city that was still emerging from the scourge of segregation.

In this 1960 event, you can see Thomas McClinton, Ann McClinton, Deloris Benson, Bill Benson, Anna Mae McClenney, and Marvin McClenney coming together for a memorable occasion.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



### A CENTER FOR YOUTH ACTIVITIES: HAMBLIN CENTER BOYS BASKETBALL

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# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## THE ICONIC EL GROTTTO LOUNGE: A LEGENDARY ENTERTAINMENT VENUE

During the 1960s, the El Grotto Lounge was a vital part of the Chitlin' Circuit, which provided a platform for African American musicians, comedians, and entertainers during the era of racial segregation.

Icons like Al Green, Wade Flemons of Earth Wind and Fire, the Dells, and Jr. Walker and the All Stars honed their skills at this establishment located at the corner of South Kendall Street and Hamblin Avenue before achieving worldwide fame. Among its performers was Bobby Holly, who is featured in the 2024 "Battle Creek Did Not Burn" documentary.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## LINDA PRATHER LANE

Linda Prather Lane is a near-lifelong Battle Creek resident and steadfast advocate for social justice. A Battle Creek Central graduate, she dedicated much of her career to the school. Linda's early years were marked by her strong ties to social justice, as her mother was an activist and a prominent member of the NAACP.

Inspired by her family's values, Linda embraced her role as a tireless advocate for equality. Her own personal activism began in the late '60s with the Young Adult Council (YAC) and escalated at 19 when she was arrested downtown at the intersection of Jackson St. and Capital Ave., during a peaceful sit-in organized by the NAACP, following Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## THELMA VAUGHN

Thelma Vaughn is a retired educator and currently active in community service. Originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Thelma began her education journey in Hampton, Virginia, where she studied at what is now Hampton University. Upon graduation, Thelma was recruited to Battle Creek Public Schools where she taught at Lincoln Elementary School for 30 years.

Today, her contributions extend to active community involvement. In 2003, she launched the "We Read" program at Second Missionary Baptist Church—a program that supports first- through fifth-grade students in the Battle Creek Public Schools district with their reading and comprehension skills.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## TIM ELLIOTT

Tim Elliott is a retired educator with a remarkable dedication to the community. Hailing from a family of esteemed educators, Tim's commitment to shaping young minds is deeply rooted. He was recruited to Battle Creek immediately after graduating from Lane College, near Memphis Tennessee.

For more than 15 years, Tim has been the creative force behind the Battle Creek Central Band Follies, infusing the local arts scene with vibrancy and talent. Beyond his educational endeavors, Tim is a valued member of the Art Center of Battle Creek's Board of Directors, contributing his expertise to the city's arts culture.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## BOBBY HOLLEY

Reverend Robert “Bobby” Holley shifted his focus from solely entertainment to activism some 30 years ago following his nephew's unsolved murder in 1987. A primary aim has been tackling gun violence and fostering community unity. The substitute teacher recently partnered to raise money to buy new bicycles and helmets for children in Calhoun County.

He has undertaken several similar cause-centered actions in the past, such as walks and symbolic protests. In addition to activism, Bobby brings positivity throughout Greater Battle Creek through music as a one-man band. His life journey through entertainment and activism reflects a steadfast commitment to addressing societal issues and making a difference in the community.



# BATTLE CREEK DID NOT BURN

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



## SHIRLEY ANN TUGGLE

Shirley Ann Tuggle is a Battle Creek native and retired Registered Nurse with a strong commitment to her community and social justice causes. She graduated from Battle Creek Central High School and has actively engaged in various organizations such as Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Battle Creek Homeless Committee, the NAACP, and the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, Inc.

In 2021, Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer appointed Shirley to several boards and commissions, including the Commission on Services to the Aging. She was a former member of the 1960s and '70s group, the Black Recondos and currently stands as a dedicated community advocate and leader.