The Black Musician and the White City
Absher, Amy

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In February 1963, violinist Carol Anderson, a twenty-three-year-old graduate of the Boston Conservatory of Music and a social worker in Chicago, sat in with the violin section of the symphony orchestra in Oak Park—an affluent white suburb of Chicago with a total population of 60,000—less than 100 of whom were African American. The symphony conductor, Milton Preves, having worked with Anderson in Chicago, was eager to have her part of the Oak Park orchestra. Later that day, Anderson received a phone call from the chairwoman of the symphony board, Mrs. Palmer, who explained to Anderson that she would not need to return for future rehearsals. The reason for the rejection was that Carol Anderson was African American.

Mrs. Palmer explained the board’s decision to the local papers by saying, “We just thought that we were not the organization to crusade and pioneer a controversial subject in the community.” According to Mrs. Palmer, the symphony would not consider integration until there was a “consensus of the community . . . in favor of that.” In the scandal that followed the rejection of Anderson by the symphony board, Preves, the symphony’s conductor, resigned in protest of the whites-only policy. One fifth of the seventy-five-member orchestra also walked out in protest.

According to newspapers at the time, community leaders responded in a similar manner. The local Methodist pastor demanded that his congregation “help the board correct this grave error at once by demonstrating to them and to our larger metropolitan area that we have advanced beyond this narrow line of prejudice.” The congregation responded by calling and harassing the symphony board and insisting that it wanted performers
“selected on the basis of ability rather than the color of their skin.” The pastor made it clear that “this is not a crusade to integrate our symphony orchestra; this is an appeal to let the board know that the people of this community want the best music performed without any reference to the color of their skin.”

For the African American community in and around Chicago reading about her, Anderson’s rejection was a reminder of the extent to which segregation limited their lives. The *Chicago Defender* likened the incident to the rejection of Marian Anderson, the famed African American singer, whom the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), barred from performing in Constitution Hall in 1939. In addition, the African American community in Chicago in 1963 was protesting against segregation in the public schools and in housing. Both examples of segregation existed despite the fact that the Supreme Court had found racial covenants illegal in 1948 and school segregation illegal in 1954. Though 1963 was the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, almost thirty years had passed since the DAR rejected Marian Anderson, and there had been clear victories in the Supreme Court, it appeared to many African Americans in Chicago that little had changed.

The newspaper coverage of Carol Anderson’s rejection and the reaction of certain segments of the Oak Park community humiliated the symphony board. The board begged Preves to take back his job. Preves refused. It begged Anderson to perform with the symphony. Anderson agreed, but only for one performance and only if Preves conducted. For the début and farewell of Carol Anderson in Oak Park, the orchestra played “Pathétique” by Tchaikovsky. 750 people attended the concert and cheered Anderson’s performance. Mrs. Palmer, who was the orchestra’s principle cellist, did not attend the concert. When the performance was over both Anderson and Preves refused to take permanent positions with the organization. They both felt that, although the symphony board had retreated from its position, it had not changed its beliefs.

Though it may not have seemed that way to African Americans living in Chicago at the time, Carol Anderson’s performance in Oak Park was a sign that there had been a change. First, the orchestra conductor and several of the musicians, all of whom were white, stood by Anderson. Second, members of the local community demanded that Anderson be considered on the grounds of merit rather than race. Finally, the symphony board had to back down because of public outrage, which was an uncommon event.
in the history of musicians in Chicago. These changes could be attributed to the successes of the civil rights movement. Perhaps equally important to reshaping white attitudes was that Black musicians had fought for and won recording contracts, and radio and television appearances, and were regularly performing before white and integrated audiences. All of these achievements had been dreams to Nathaniel Dett and the other Black musicians in Chicago since the early twentieth century.

Despite these successes, musicians in Chicago, as Carol Anderson demonstrated, were far from emancipated. It was difficult for them to find work north of 22nd Street in 1963. They were not employed at white-run radio stations or in Chicago’s Symphony Orchestra. One reason was that the power of the segregated American Federation of Musicians to buttress discriminatory practices still existed.

For many African American musicians in Chicago, the rejection of Carol Anderson provided the impetus to take a public stand against the segregated union. The disgruntled musicians had been holding informal meetings since December 1962 in bandleader Red Saunders’s house in the Woodlawn neighborhood on the South Side. Carol Anderson’s experience prompted them to move their meetings from the living room to the union halls. The decision to oppose the union was a perilous one for these musicians. In choosing to directly contest segregation, they were also threatening to destabilize the autonomous Black cultural sphere, which since the 1920s and 1930s had defied white control of the city.

The musicians wishing to end segregation had opponents in Black union Local 208. Among them were the local’s leaders Harry Gray, Charles Elgar, and Walter Dyett. These three men embodied the idea born in the early twentieth century that separate Black institutions were an attribute and a necessity to building Chicago’s Black community in the face of white oppression. At the time of the revolt, Harry Gray had been president of the local for nearly forty years. Walter Dyett, one of the most outspoken of the leaders of Local 208, built his career as the bandleader for the 184th Field Artillery Band and as a music teacher in the city’s most prominent Black high school, DuSable. In this capacity, he trained most of the city’s musicians, including many of the musicians who joined with Red Saunders. The third member of the board, Charles Elgar, was born in New Orleans in 1879 and began working in Chicago in 1903. He contributed to the building of the musicians’ union local and the migration network by actively recruiting other musicians to move from New Orleans.
to Chicago. By the early 1960s, Elgar was a music teacher and a mentor to younger musicians, and performed regularly in the public schools.

In these three examples there is a wealth of information regarding the leadership of Local 208. First, they were from an older generation of musicians. Elgar was one of the local’s first members. Gray and Dyett represented only the second generation of Local 208 leadership. In short, they had lived all of the union history with Local 10 and segregation, whereas Red Saunders’s fellows represented a cross section of musicians in regard to age, migration pattern, the methods by which they learned music, and the genre they played. The historical memory of Saunders’s group also differed from that of Local 208 leaders. They knew the history of segregation, but they had not lived it in the same way or as extensively as the leaders of Local 208 did. Nor did they have to build a professional organization in the face of segregation. Saunders’s group and the local’s leaders did have one thing in common: they were men. Black women made up less than 7 percent of the Black local. Even though Carol Anderson’s travails motivated Saunders’s group, women, with the exception of one female white board member, were not sought out for their leadership on any side of the debate.

Through the course of the debate, it became apparent that within the two groups of African Americans there were different ideas concerning segregation. The leaders of the dissidents sought and found support in the major integrationist organizations of the early 1960s. The dissidents also had a historical advantage: they staged their demand for membership in the white local in 1963, during the Emancipation Proclamation’s centennial. In their pamphlets and rallies they made use of language from the March on Washington, held that same summer. This allowed them to see their movement as part of the broader civil rights movement to “correct the old evils of segregation and discrimination . . . currently sweeping the entire nation . . . .”

The Local 208 leaders occupied a different place in the spectrum of African American activism and history. It should not be forgotten that the majority of the Black local’s leaders were born in the late nineteenth century; they migrated from the South for jobs and to escape southern racism and racial violence, and in Chicago they found an affluent Black middle class that had built an independent community. As leaders, they modeled themselves on this middle class. This is why their union seemed to have one foot standing atop the writings of Booker T. Washington, who in the 1890s promoted racial consciousness as a
means of creating economic independence and solidarity of the Black middle class. Meanwhile, the Black union local had its other foot firmly planted in the radical beliefs of W.E.B. Du Bois, who in the 1930s demanded that African Americans boycott businesses that did not employ Blacks because he believed that political agitation was the way to guarantee economic rights. The Black local combined the seemingly disparate philosophies of Washington and Du Bois because neither philosophy alone could adequately address the real-world needs of Chicago’s musicians. Their thinking regarding race and labor speaks to the multifaceted nature of the identities they constructed through the union. No simplistic definition driven by affiliation with a social, ethnic, religious, linguistic, political, or economic group determined their, or their opposition’s, behavior.

Because of its history of self-sufficiency and autonomy, Local 208 had a great deal more in common with Black fraternal and benevolent societies in Chicago and the welfare capitalist tradition prior to the 1940s than with the white American Federation of Musicians local. The development of clubs—such as the YMCA, and organizations—such as the Urban League, was a defining characteristic of the Black public sphere. The community had to develop autonomous institutions in the early twentieth century because African Americans were refused membership in existing institutions. For example, Local 208 owned a credit union for its members, a union building that had rehearsal space for members, and a musicians-only apartment building, which were benefits that the members of the white local did not have. Social-welfare benefits were important because landlords often refused to rent to musicians. Bank accounts and retirement plans were hard to come by because the Black musician’s life was often transient and unstable—so much so that Local 208 union cards, unlike those of the white local, did not list the member’s address or phone number. Such benefit programs and policies were symbolic of how different the two locals were in terms of leadership and their roles were in the lives of their members.

The leaders of the Black local were also different from the most prominent labor leaders in Chicago at the time. As labor organizers, they came to power at the same time that Chicago labor leader A. Philip Randolph, of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, was warning against dependence on white institutions and white patronage. However, a gap began to form between the strategies of Local 208 and other Black labor groups in the 1930s with the emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organiza-
tions (CIO). In the 1930s, the CIO was a new and radical association that believed the labor movement would find success only if white, Black, and Hispanic workers unified. The CIO needed Black labor if the organization was to prevail in the life-and-death struggle that was labor politics in cities like Chicago in the first half of the twentieth century. In 1940s Chicago, the coalition resulted in the desegregation of public transit jobs. The recognition of the importance of integration and the power of Black labor transformed leaders such as Randolph into nationally recognized figures with the cachet needed to force Franklin Roosevelt to desegregate the defense industry.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the leaders of Local 208 had no such value to the American Federation of Musicians, which was affiliated with the more segregationist American Federation of Labor (AFL). While other Black labor leaders, including Randolph, moved toward seeing integration as a necessity, the leaders of Local 208 continued to build a separate institution devoted to the development of an autonomous labor force. They had reason to feel this way because, even after the CIO and AFL merged in the 1950s, the American Federation of Musicians continued to support segregated locals. Following the merger, James Petrillo, the president of Chicago’s white local and of the executive board of the American Federation of Musicians, was elected to the executive board of the AFL-CIO. Petrillo’s continued position of power was the ultimate sign that Black labor rights were not a priority within the union.

In the musicians’ union, both the Black integrationists and the Black separatists wanted equality. The difference between the two groups of labor leaders was that one believed integration and equality were possible. The other group, which included Local 208, felt more skeptical of a coalition with whites.

Furthermore, the development of the Black local paralleled the rise of the modern ghetto in Chicago from the 1930s through the 1960s. Living in a racially segregated and economically deprived part of the city, the Black local’s leaders, as well as many of the local’s members, began to form a Black ethos that was an expression of the ways in which Black Chicago had urbanized in a divergent way from white Chicago. Being separate from white Chicago contributed to the formation of the Black local’s intellectual genealogy of protest through self-sufficiency. The intellectual history of the leaders of Local 208 was the same history that formed and informed protest at the street level in Chicago among community groups and youth gangs, who in 1963 were demanding better school facilities.
and the establishment of Black studies classes. The same history underscored the work of Chicago’s Elijah Muhammad, Fred Hampton, and a young Malcolm X. Like the Black local, all these men were shaped by the Chicago experience and sought to build independent Black institutions because they believed that equality in a world dominated by whites was a delusive possibility.

Therefore, life in segregated Chicago had politicized Saunders’s group and the local’s leaders in different ways. Their lives stand as an example of how individuals recombined their various identities in ways that led them to assume new types of collective action. The union leaders believed that in pushing for segregation, whites had inadvertently forced the creation of Black spaces—nightclubs, schools, barbershops, and so forth—that fostered the development of community identities and cultures. In a sense they understood themselves and their union through the lens of the Black public sphere. As they saw it, they were contributing to and being formed by a broadly conceived social and cultural history of politics operating in terms of a specific spatial setting. In arguing that African Americans gained strength from these spaces, the union leaders were also contending that integration threatened to be a new form of oppression that would reduce Black representation in the union and erase Black community identity. The pro-autonomy position held by the Black union leaders stood in striking contrast to that held by Saunders and the other dissidents who believed that an all-Black leadership could be as dissatisfying as an all-white leadership. For these musicians, merging the locals would bring equality to the city and greater economic self-determination for all Black musicians.

The debate over integration of the union cannot be understood apart from the history of how the leaders of Local 208, who in the early twentieth century helped to establish the Black cultural sphere on the South Side as a way of resisting white oppression, came into conflict with a direct-action collective seizing on the advances of the civil rights movement. This debate illustrates that Black musicians were far from being passive unionists easily manipulated by white exclusionary politics. Rather, they represented varying strategies and responses to the difficulty of negotiating and surviving racism in Chicago. Though one group supported autonomy and the other wanted immediate and total integration, it would be a mistake to view this history in terms of heroes and villains. Rather, the two groups represented the complexities of the African American response to racism in Chicago from 1902, when the Black local formed, through the early 1960s.
Though Red Saunders, seizing on the treatment of Carol Anderson, may have forced the debate into the public eye, as the conflict played out, it would not be Red Saunders and his fellows that ultimately represented Black musicians in the merger. Instead, the “old men” of Local 208’s board represented the 1,700 Black union musicians. The Black union leaders would have to contend with the white union leadership and try to ensure that the musicians’ union would achieve not only integration but also equality. Having spent sixty years standing their ground against white segregationists, the Black union leaders found themselves, because of the actions of the dissident musicians, finally debating segregation with the white union leadership. The ensuing labor fight was a contest for the authorship of integration, and it called into question all that Chicago’s Black musicians’ community had built.

CREATING A GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT

Red Saunders was a man raised in a segregated world. Born in Memphis in 1912, he moved with his five siblings to Chicago in 1923 following the death of his mother and abandonment by his father. His oldest sister had friends in Chicago—Lil and Louis Armstrong—with whom the family stayed upon their arrival in the city. The segregation and economics of Chicago’s South Side in the 1920s necessitated that Saunders’s sister pass for white in order to find a job that paid enough to support her and the younger children.34

Saunders and his sister had similar complexions. Had he wanted to, he could have passed for white as well. Saunders’s choice to be a Black musician suggests that in the 1920s and 1930s, there were more economic opportunities for Black musicians in Chicago than there were for a single Black woman trying to raise a family. Moreover, knowing Louis Armstrong for nearly all of his life connected Saunders to the musicians’ community, and helped him and his siblings survive the migration to Chicago from the South. The story of Saunders’s youth illustrates the power and cohesiveness of the Black public sphere on the South Side in the early twentieth century. Yet in 1962, Saunders was working to integrate the musicians’ union, an action that threatened to destabilize the Black public sphere and the musicians’ community. Something had clearly changed for Saunders.

Being a musician in Chicago meant that Saunders would have found it difficult to play a union job beyond the limits of the South Side. It also
meant that he could not hire white musicians to play in his orchestra because that would have broken union rules. Saunders did break this rule to accommodate Josephine Baker. In 1960, Baker performed at Chicago’s Club DeLisa. As the orchestra leader, a position he had held since the late 1930s, Saunders had to hire musicians who could play Baker’s arrangements, which required that Saunders hire accordion and violin players. He could find African American violinists on the South Side, but the accordion was not a prominent African American instrument in Chicago. White accordion players demanded that Saunders pay the white local’s pay scale, which was higher than the Black local’s scale. Saunders paid. By doing so, he violated the Black local’s rules and was called before the board to defend himself. The experience of the hearings led him to seriously contemplate desegregating the union.

Saunders initiated the dissident movement in the early 1960s by quietly approaching musicians backstage. He would whisper something like, “How do you feel about the all Negro Union?” If the musicians expressed dissatisfaction with the union, he invited them to the secret meetings held on each Sunday afternoon in his living room. The first meeting was in December 1962 and thereafter occurred once a week. Saunders, as bandleader transformed into labor leader, was responsible for emboldening the other musicians and convincing them to proceed quietly until the appropriate time to make their move. At these meetings, he never mentioned his own problems with the union, nor did he mention what had transpired at his closed-door punitive hearings with the local’s board.

As it turned out, it was not that hard for Saunders to find other disgruntled musicians. For decades, the musicians of Local 208 had been dissatisfied with their work conditions and they had amassed a long list of grievances. They knew that the white local, Local 10, paid twice as much in death benefits as the Black local did and they knew that the dues of the Black local were higher than the white local. Furthermore, the discontented musicians believed that the Black local’s leadership was corrupt in that the leaders only gave jobs to their friends. The fact that they were not offered jobs outside of the South Side and that the union’s national conventions were always held in southern cities, with dehumanizing racial traditions, made the union’s support of segregation obvious. Adding to the problems was the leadership of the Black local, whom they had seen side with club owners over musicians in disputes. Then there was the problem of the national union’s white leadership, who in 1944
had claimed that segregated locals were “entirely satisfactory to the col-
ored membership.” The members of Black Local 208 were also aware
that the one previous Black-led attempt to merge the Chicago locals, in
the 1930s, had failed.

However, times were changing. The other major union cities, such as
Los Angeles and Denver, had already integrated their locals by 1962. Chi-
cago was the last holdout. This was ironic because Chicago was also the
first major city to have segregated locals. For those dissatisfied with the
segregated union, 1962 presented an historic opportunity. James Petrillo,
who had reigned as the president of the white local since the 1920s and
opposed desegregation, had been voted out of office. Replacing him was a
group of younger leaders whom the Black dissidents hoped would be more
amenable to integration.

Given the situation, it was not hard to find musicians interested in
talking about desegregation. Finding musicians willing to go against white
union leaders as well as the Black union leaders was a different story. To
overcome the fear of opposing the union leadership, Saunders—who, be-
lieving himself to be a dissident, had met briefly to discuss how to create
a social movement with community leaders associated with The Wood-
lawn Organization, a protest group taught by Saul Alinsky—realized he
had to use the connections between bandleaders and orchestras. Saun-
ders began by approaching his own orchestra members and then other
bandleaders, such as William “Lefty” Bates, who then spread the move-
ment among their bandmates. The result was a group of musicians that
illustrated the diversity among musicians in Chicago, as well as refuted
any argument that this was a movement solely of younger musicians or
musicians of only one genre. The members of the dissident movement
spanned generations, migration patterns, genres, and competing music
theories. Even the ways they had learned music was different. Some of
the members were street trained, others had learned from recordings, and
still others learned in school and military bands. What all of them had in
common was that, with the exception of Saunders and Bates, they were
not headliners or stars. The majority of those who joined were not able
to use fame to cushion the impact of segregation on their careers. Rather,
they were the workingmen of the musician world, a faction of sidemen,
fighting for the right to make a better living.

The dissidents had a difficult task before them. Though a large number
of Black musicians were not happy about segregation in the union, those
who were willing to come forward and protest were in the minority.
Being Black musicians did not make them radicals. Choosing to oppose institutional segregation openly and risk their careers did. The fear of being known dissidents was the first obstacle they had to overcome. Then, they had to accept that they were questioning the mandate of the Black union leaders. Finally, they had to develop a protest style and rhetoric that could challenge both the union’s formal and informal methods of control.

The Black local was a bureaucratic organization that relied on written forms of communication and control while simultaneously maintaining the informal cliques that constituted the union’s leadership. Essentially, the union worked to formalize status and employment by defining jobs, contract parameters, and wage scales. Union membership was one of the key components to understanding oneself as a professional musician rather than as an amateur, which meant that the union exercised a great deal of control over the social standing of the musicians. The amount of bureaucratic control in the hands of the union board often put musicians at a disadvantage in disputes over contracts and pay between musicians and venue owners. Businessmen could wait for union decisions, but the musician could not wait because it meant lost pay. In filing a complaint, a musician risked the possibility of not being hired for future jobs, and the possibility of becoming known as a troublemaker.47

The informal superstructure of “old men,” as the local’s membership called them, controlled everything. In both the white local and the Black local, the power of the old men was an accepted fact, as was the possibility that a musician could starve to death waiting for the settlement of disputes. Younger musicians, in both the white and Black locals, felt that they were at a disadvantage in this system because the control of both the formal and informal parts of the union was in the hands of the same clique. Challenging this group and failing would mean that all the musicians involved with the insurrection would be purged from the union and stripped of their identities as professional musicians.48

As Saunders and his fellows proceeded in their plan of attack, they focused on the union itself rather than picketing businesses that did not hire Black musicians. By presenting the union as the problem, they could argue that outsiders—namely, the union leaders—were controlling the Black musician’s economic destiny. In focusing on the union, they identified the problem as being the reinforcement of institutional segregation by a network of leaders whose power was contingent upon the continuation of segregation. The dissident’s strategy for dismantling this situation was to destroy the mythology that said Black musicians were satisfied
with segregation and with dependency on union leadership for jobs. Questioning and dismantling the segregated structure of the musicians’ union became their end goal.

**THE REVOLT**

Through the winter of 1962 and 1963, Saunders’s group quietly amassed members. Then it staged a public protest that would purposefully shock the Black union local’s leaders, who were accustomed to facing little or no organized resistance from the musicians. The existence of a radical group of Black musicians became apparent to all of Chicago on March 20, 1963, when Saunders’s group, motivated by the treatment of Carol Anderson, marched into the white local’s headquarters and demanded membership. The leaders of the white local were advised by their attorneys that, according to the bylaws of the union and the growing number of civil-rights laws and lawsuits, they had to accept the Black members. “200 Musicians Revolt, Join Mixed Union,” announced the headline on the front page of the *Chicago Defender.* While the enraged leaders of the Black union local called them “dissidents,” and the Chicago papers described them as a “rebel faction” of musicians, the 200 called themselves the Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration. At the time, they represented less than 10 percent of the Black local’s membership. However, a week after the initial protest, eighty-four more Black musicians defected to the white local. This pattern continued throughout the summer and into the fall of 1963.

There was an immediate cost to forcing integration. After the dissidents went public with their protests, the leaders of Local 208 demonstrated their power over the musicians by firing the dissidents’ wives who did office work for the local. They refused membership applications from the dissidents’ relatives and removed the dissidents from the membership rolls of the local, which destroyed the musicians’ seniority and eliminated the possibility of a death-benefit payment. In addition, after the existence of the dissident movement became apparent, they began receiving death threats. The retaliation against the integrationists suggested that even though it was a Black-led union local, the leaders were not opposed to using Chicago-style tactics in an attempt to maintain power.

Following the seemingly spontaneous protest of March 20, the Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration had two goals. First, they needed
to make their movement sustainable. Second, they wanted to dominate the voting at Local 208’s annual meeting in September 1963. Both of these goals required that they build membership and dismantle the culture of fear that kept Black musicians from challenging their union leadership.

The Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration had a problem: many of the group’s members, including Saunders, were undereducated, or had a low level of literacy. If they were going to oppose the union, reach younger musicians, and use the media effectively, their word-of-mouth campaign would have to shift to written forms of protest. Saunders solved this problem by relying on two younger members of his protest group, drummer Charles Walton and flautist James Mack, both of whom were in their late twenties, university trained, and teaching in the city’s public colleges. Following the March protest, they began creating letters and pamphlets that the dissidents sent to Local 208 members and the local media.52

In these letters, the Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration presented the argument that the musicians were in a “position” to correct the “evils of Local 208” and obtain membership in a “larger, more progressive, more prosperous local. . . .” They contended, “There is no room for segregation among musicians in Chicago. Those of us who have joined Local 10 have already started to participate in the benefits. . . .” They recommended that anyone doubting this should talk to one of the “more than 200 members of the Local 208 who also belong to Local 10.” After all, the 200 were among the “most working musicians in the city. . . .” James Mack also informed the newspapers that Local 208 took dues but provided no services and did nothing about the proliferation of “record spinners in clubs who . . . are putting musicians out of work.” They accused the leaders of Local 208 of “running the Local for the benefit of themselves and a few cronies.”53

In the fall of 1963, the dissidents switched from the small meetings, and mailings, to holding large rallies where they could organize a force to pack the Local 208 annual meeting held on October 6, 1963. Approximately 400 musicians attended the rallies, which was impressive given the fact that the Black local had 1,700 members. This illustrates that the number of dissidents had doubled since March 1963. Still the dissidents did not, and never would, become a majority among the membership of the Black local, though they may have been the majority of engaged members. At the rallies, James Mack emerged as the spokesman for the Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration. Arguing against separate locals, Mack
contended, “Black representation is not necessarily good representation, not only in this local but sometimes in the Board of Education, the City Council and the United States Congress.”

The conflict between the local’s leaders and the dissidents came to a head at the annual meeting of Local 208 when the dissident spokesmen—Morris Ellis, Thomas Rigsby, Lefty Bates, Charles Walton, and James Mack—demanded that the regular order of business be suspended and that all present listen to their resolution. The resolution began by declaring that the “arbitrary division along racial lines of the brotherhood of professional musicians in this jurisdiction is mutually harmful to both Local 208 and Local 10” and ended by demanding that a merger take place within ten days of the vote.

Local 208 leadership declared the resolution “unfavorable” and decided to hold a secret ballot right then and there. The ballot asked the members to choose between “I am against a merger of Local 208 with Local 10” or “I am for a merger of Local 208 with Local 10, but only on terms which the officers of Local 208 think are fair to the membership of Local 208 and which are approved by said membership.” The leadership wrote the language of the ballot and determined it “conclusive on the question and binding.” Of course, no matter what the vote, the union leaders would maintain their power, and there was the possibility there would never be a merger. The plebiscite showed 283 votes for the merger, 43 votes against the merger, and 19 votes spoiled.

THE OTHER SIDE: THE LEADERS OF THE 208

What transpired at the annual meeting illustrated that there were divisions within Local 208 concerning integration. While the dissidents exemplified the growing feelings of resentment and dejection many felt toward the union system, the Local 208 leaders represented the other side. They believed that by building up the power of Local 208 they were ensuring the musicians’ right to work and standard of living. For example, Gray, the local’s president, had persuaded the DeLisa family to double the pay of Saunders’s orchestra in 1937. When the family refused, Gray went to their offices and argued with them until they doubled the pay and gave each member of the orchestra five extra dollars a week. The Black union leaders felt that the only way to safeguard these basic rights and effective level of representation was by maintaining an autonomous local.
The two factions saw segregation, resistance, and the history of the local in contrasting terms. For example, the leaders of Local 208 placed greater emphasis on race solidarity than on class solidarity. In looking at the union through this light, the local’s leaders saw the events beginning in March 1963 as a “raid” perpetrated on their local by the new regime of white union leaders. They saw the dissidents as compromising the strength of the Black musician community when they broke ranks and “defected” to the white local.

There was no evidence that the white local’s leaders initiated a raid. Nevertheless, the lack of evidence did not stop the Black leaders from distrusting the white leaders. Many of the white leaders had come to power in late 1962 when they drove Petrillo and his allies out of office. From the perspective of the Black local’s leaders, the white local’s board was inexperienced and unpredictable. The Black leaders demanded that the union’s executive board appoint Petrillo as the moderator for the merger talks. The executive board refused. At first glance, it would appear that they were calling on the engineer of segregation to also engineer the integration. Certainly, the dissidents saw it that way. The rank and file of the Black local had always thought that Gray and Petrillo had a backroom deal regarding the segregation of the local and the request that Petrillo be brought into the merger discussions seemed to confirm the rumor. However, Petrillo was the white leader with whom the Black union board members were accustomed to dealing. When facing the loss of the Black local, the Black leaders preferred the white leader they knew to the white leaders they did not know.60

Among Black musicians, there were many who supported the Local 208 leaders, such as saxophonist James Ellis, whose brother Morris was one of the “defectors.” James Ellis voiced his skepticism of Black musicians having power in a merged union when he asked, “What chance will there be of electing a Negro president of the combined locals?” Jazz trumpeter Robert Schoffner agreed, saying, “Local 10 is not interested in Negro members. They are interested in Negro assets. . . . Why don’t [the A.F.M.] force the local 10 to merge with us?” Schoffner made this argument on the basis that Local 208 had always been integrated since Black musicians accepted white musicians who sought work in the Black combos. He saw the “defectors” who were unwilling to throw their support behind Local 208 as traitors.61

The leaders of Local 208 also found support from the Woodlawn Booster—a community paper representing the Woodlawn neighborhood,
where many of the musicians lived. The *Woodlawn Booster*’s editors supported the idea that “integration defeats its purpose if Negroes are merely swallowed up in the whole, all present identity destroyed without full identification with the whole immediately ensuing.” The editors believed it was time to end segregation in trade unions and in “every area of American life,” but they urged that rather than judging integration by its ends union leaders should focus on creating a “clear beginning. . . . That is, it is not enough to merely accept Negroes into membership under the circumstances prevailing in the musicians union.” “Whatever leadership and power Negroes have managed to develop,” the *Woodlawn Booster* argued, “should be enhanced rather than destroyed if integration is to prove more than an imposter.” “True integration,” the paper suggested, “would seem more likely under the leadership of the Local 208 rather than the Local 10.”

The community support for the leaders of the Black local illustrates another division between those pushing for integration and those resisting it. Saunders’s group understood and promoted the short-term gains of integrating, such as a higher pay scale and the potential for working throughout the city. They also knew that the times had changed and that it would be impossible to maintain union segregation in the future. By contrast, the leaders of the Black local and their supporters’ point of argument emphasized the long-term consequences of destroying the local, and permanently damaging the Black public sphere. For them, the cost of integration, such as the loss of community and self-determination, was too high. Even more so, they were beginning to acknowledge the painful reality that the existence of so many dissidents meant that they, the Black union leaders, could no longer argue there was only one Black community.

**THE MERGER: A FIGHT FOR AUTHORSHIP OF INTEGRATION**

Despite the best efforts of the Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration, they were not present at the merger negotiations. Instead, the Local 208 board represented African American musicians. As they began the talks with Local 10 in late October 1963, Local 208 leaders were angry and ready to resist the white leaders. For them, this was a historic moment because the merger meetings represented the first time they had ever been invited by the union or any other segregated institution to a
meeting to discuss such matters. They wanted to take advantage of the situation by demanding written protections against discrimination, “a merger of equals,” a focus on employment rights, and guarantees of representation.63

Sitting across the table from the Black union leaders was the board of Local 10. A portion of the board, including president Bernard Richards, a jazz bandleader from Evanston, had defeated longtime president James Petrillo the previous year. The new board members, who ran against Petrillo because they believed he was paid too much and did not work to develop social benefits for members, were eager to use the merger debate to prove they could lead Local 10 as effectively as Petrillo had. In March 1963, they had accepted the 200 Black musicians on their attorney’s recommendation. In the following months, they seized on the dissident movement as a way to embarrass the Black union leaders by continually suggesting to the press that the white local was the local of racial equality and the Black local was the bulwark of racism. The white leaders worked to prove that they were supporters of integration by taking on Red Saunders, and his second in command, Leon Washington, as informal advisers to the local’s board on race issues. Therefore, in October 1963, when the merger talks began, the white union’s leaders came to the merger table having won the public-relations battle. They also intended to also win the merger.64

Early in the discussions, the leaders from Local 208 presented a resolution that, among other things, insisted that a clause be written into the combined local’s bylaws prohibiting discrimination. The issue of discrimination became the primary topic of discussion and haunted all the subsequent meetings because at its core there were grave differences in how the two groups experienced race and how they defined discrimination.65 Specifically, Local 208 demanded that there be guarantees that the members of Local 208 be given full membership rights rather than being held as new members, which would have subjected Black musicians to a loss of seniority and death-benefit privileges. Also, they would have been liable to the standard new member probation, which would have prevented the Black musicians from working in the city. In addition, the Black leaders wanted the board of directors and the other union committees to have a guaranteed position for a Black member. They worried that their members would be lost in the combined local because they would be a minority. The question of representation extended to the trial committee because it would be in the committee that issues regarding discrimina-
tion would be heard and ruled on by the union. The importance they placed on representation, in combination with their fears of possible discrimination within the white union, led the Local 208 leaders to demand that there be an oversight board in place composed of non-AFM members. All of their demands would require that the bylaws of the union be rewritten to among other things, prohibit discrimination.66

The Local 10 leadership rejected all of these proposals. They believed that the Local 208 board was simply trying to protect its power base by insisting on a mandatory board position for themselves—an accusation that ignored the fact that the Black leaders wanted elections to be held, which meant they were willing to risk their positions for the sake of Black representation. The white leaders replied to the request by offering severance pay and lifetime membership to the Local 208 board. As for the issue of the bylaws, Local 10 argued that no ban on discrimination clause could be added because discrimination could never be defined. What followed was a bitter discussion in which Local 208 attempted to explain discrimination.67

The leaders of Local 208 were “fearful of discrimination against the Negro musicians in this joined union and fearful of unfair representation of the Negro musicians . . .” because they knew the AFM’s history of racism and believed that only an African American would, or could, defend the rights of Local 208 members. “The fact still remains,” contended Everett Samuels, the recording secretary of Local 208, “we are Negroes. . . . Being Negroes we are fully cognizant of all pitfalls we must try to avoid.”68

Local 208’s leadership was suggesting that guaranteed Black representation was the only way to prevent discrimination as well as the “swallowing” up of Black members by Local 10. If they were subsumed by Local 10, then, according to the 208 leaders, this would guarantee that the former Local 208 members would lose their history, distinctiveness, and voice in the union.69

To demand absolute equality and singularity at the same time appeared like an inconsistency to Local 10. From the white leaders’ perspective, making a board position available only to a Black member of the union would be discrimination in that it was the opposite of an open election. They rejected proposals suggesting the guaranteed position would not be for a Black musician but for a former member of Local 208 because Local 208 was, as they pointed out, synonymous with being “Negro.” They also rejected any provision that would make board-member positions responsible to geographic districts, saying that this would be the same as making one position available only to African Americans. In these rejections, the representative from the national union board and the leaders of Local 10 revealed that they were not as ignorant of the existence of discrimina-
tion as they feigned. In fact, they seemed to have a developed working knowledge of the segregation of African Americans in the city, as well as that imposed by the union.

At this point, the leaders of Local 208 raised the question of why they were being compelled to join Local 10 and why Local 10 was not being compelled into Local 208. For this there was no direct answer, but the minutes from the meetings repeatedly refer to the merged union as the “surviving local,” which was always assumed to be Local 10. If the leaders of Local 208 refused the merger, then the federation would simply dissolve its charter, leaving the members without representation or benefits, which would force them to join Local 10. It appeared to the leaders of Local 208 that this was not integration as they defined it because the AFM did not see Local 208 as equal to Local 10. The leaders of Local 10 argued that they were treating the members of Local 208 as equals by granting no special privileges to them.

The leaders of Local 208 continued to demand voting rights and representation, but little would come of it. “When members of Local 208 get into difficulties,” the Black leaders asked, “who is going to be able to stand up like the current leadership?” “The Convention of the A.F. of M. will be lily-white, and what representation will the Negro have? There won’t be any Negro at the convention unless there is some white man someone will call a nigger-lover.” The leaders of Local 10 were unable to understand the constant demands for representation and were only able to reply by asking, “Do you object to nigger lovers?”

The talks went on in this manner for over a year. Local 208 and Local 10 were never able to understand one another, in part because of the distrust born of the racial system in Chicago. Though the leaders of Local 10 were for integration, they defined it as bringing Local 208 into Local 10, making it seem as though Local 208 were a subsidiary of Local 10, because Local 10 was the first local in Chicago. The leadership of Local 208 was vocal about not being swallowed up by the white local. Integration, in the perspective of the Black leaders, was not about strengthening Local 10, but about protecting the membership and the accomplishments of Local 208 from Local 10. The definition of what integration was became the core of the negotiations for the merger. Ultimately, the talks broke down completely on March 23, 1964. In response, the national board took drastic measures. The issue that ended the talks was Local 10’s ultimatum that Local 208 accept that there would be two positions on the executive board reserved for former members of Local 208 and the leaders of Local 10 would appoint these board members. This was a demeaning proposition
from the perspective of the Black leadership because it was an attempt to placate demands for representative democracy with tokenism. Local 208 denounced the idea as creating “Uncle Toms” and demanded an election be held.\textsuperscript{73} Local 10 had already taken on Red Saunders and Leon Washington, leaders of the dissidents, as informal advisors. It was the Black leaders’ fear that these men would fill the two \textit{appointed} positions on the board.\textsuperscript{74}

The union’s national body—in a move that suggested that there were some white leaders who supported Black rights in the union, even if it was just for expediency—recommended that the merger grant the members of Local 208 full membership in Local 10. In this plan, the merged local would have a combined executive board, composed of members of both the white and the Black locals, until the finalization of the merger. Also, the plan included a provision that the terms of office of the current Black leaders would end when the merger talks were completed, but that members of Local 208 would be able to vote for their own representatives to serve on the governing boards of the merged locals, which included three board members.\textsuperscript{75} When the American Federation of Musicians’ Executive Board issued its merger plan, in April 1964, “Local 208 accepted the plan . . . but Local 10 rejected it and in due course appealed the decision of the Executive Board. . . .”\textsuperscript{76}

From the point of view of the leaders of Local 208, Local 10 rejected the merger plan of April 1964 because the plan contained a provision that only Local 208 members would be eligible to vote for Local 208 officers in the first election after the merger.\textsuperscript{77} This drove leaders from Local 10 to stop attending meetings. The executive board responded by placing the locals into trusteeship. The leaders of Local 208 stated that they were not in favor of the resulting merger plan. They objected partly because the trusteeship ended the potential for further negotiations, which they felt took away the voice of the Black musician and meant that the white leaders never had to return to the table. Also, the property of Local 208 was to be sold after the merger so that Local 10 could absorb the wealth of the Black local and not the physical property owned by the Black local.\textsuperscript{78}

For their part, the leaders of Local 10 argued that the merger plan presented by the union’s national body “was prejudiced against the white majority” and would result in a continuation of segregation.\textsuperscript{79} After failing to win the negotiations, the white leaders became so frustrated that they blamed the merger problems on the leaders of Local 208, calling them “Black nationalists.”\textsuperscript{780} In doing so, the white leaders were inadvertently suggesting that Saunders and his fellows were now the establishment and the leaders of Local 208 had become the dissidents. Though they never
acknowledged why the Black union leaders acted on such ideas, the white union leaders were not entirely incorrect in their assessment of the Black union leaders’ intellectual genealogy. Being musicians, and being teachers, the Black union leaders were interested in Black cultural significance. They were also keenly aware of the economic realities of segregation and the potential for Black culture to serve as a resource in the fight for liberation. They did not think of these issues in a diasporic, metaphysical, or postcolonial sense; rather, they, like protestors throughout the city, understood the problems and their resistance as grounded in their relationship to the white power structure— in this case, the union, as well as the city’s socio-economic underpinnings. At their core, the Black unionists’ arguments were a reflection of Chicago’s history of Black leaders who questioned whether it would be better to create an autonomous community from whites rather than fight for inclusion. The ideas expressed by the leaders of Local 208 were an example of how the uplift strategies of the early twentieth century survived and shaped the politics of the mid-twentieth century.

END GAME

The merger did go through in 1966, after the federation put the Chicago locals in trusteeship. One reason for the merger’s eventual realization was that the legal landscape of the United States had changed drastically after the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The 1966 merger agreement allowed for two positions on the executive board to be voted on solely by former members of Local 208 for six years. The union’s national board felt that six years would be enough time for “the members of Local 10 to be made aware of the intelligence of Negroes who might seek an office in the merged local.”

Though there was a merger, the established network of connections that existed in the white local continued to dominate the Chicago union. The highest paying and steadiest jobs continued to go to the white musicians. There must have been some dissatisfaction with the merger on the part of the former Local 208 members, because Red Saunders formed a new group called the Kole Facts Association (KFA) and issued broadsides that listed the benefits of the merger. Most of the gains were financial, such as lower taxes on the yearly union card and lower dues. There were also gains made in terms of organization. “Do you realize,” the KFA letter stated, “you have a membership book listing all members and what they play . . . there is a monthly union meeting . . . you can voice your
opinion, or express your grievances on any subject you so desire. . . .” In addition, the KFA wanted to call the members’ attention to the fact that five “negro musicians were employed in venues never before recognized to them. . . .” The jobs included one record flipper at radio station WCFL, a nine-month run in the pit at the Schubert Theatre, and employment for three musicians employed at CBS studios, where they were paid $225 a week with a promise of ten hours of work a week. 84

Of course, the KFA letter did not explain that the five Black musicians employed in the radio stations, the Schubert Theatre, and CBS studios were all from the leadership of the Chicago Musicians for Harmonious Integration. 85 Though these five Black musicians had found jobs in formerly white-dominated areas, the merger had not created a significant change in hiring practices, which is evident in the fact that discrimination continued to exist in the symphonies, the operas, and the bands at radio and television stations. Merging the two locals should have reduced the practice of discrimination, but it did not do so right away. It turns out there were not enough white musicians, conductors, and bookers in Chicago like Milton Preves. In fact, the reason given for not hiring Black musicians was the persistent stereotype that they could not read music. 86 As a rumor, this one was insidious because it allowed for the demeaning of Black musicians while providing cover for racial prejudice. In response, because they were the only ones left to represent the Black members of the union, the KFA filed suits with the National Labor Relations Board against the American Federation of Musicians in 1967. 87 Their lawsuits failed to cause a change in hiring practices. There would not be a Black member of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra until 2002. 88

From the perspective of Tom Crown, a white trumpeter working in Chicago at the time, the situation was as confusing as it was sad. He was good friends with players, such as flautist James Mack, whom he suspected would have been a prominent figure on the national scene had he been white. 89 Crown also had the experience before the merger of once filling in for a friend in a South Side venue, Roberts Show Lounge, which at the time was the largest Black-owned venue in the country. 90 Despite the fact that he was white and a young performer, he found that the other performers and the audience welcomed him. He knew there were individual musicians who found ways to “jump the color line,” but he was also well aware that “segregation was pretty complete. . . . Black bands played largely on the South Side, and white bands on the North Side,” which included the symphony. In the years after the merger, he was aware that change was slow to come and, in the case of the symphony, reluctant to come. 91
The dispute with the theaters and the symphony demonstrate that, even though they could theoretically work anywhere in the city for the first time in decades, the Black musicians gained few new jobs following the merger. Adding to their troubles, jobs in the “black belt” continued to disappear. The Black local in Chicago, like the Black local in Los Angeles, had a lower pay scale than the white local. Following the merger, the white local’s scale was the standard. The small clubs that had been the Black musicians’ primary venues since the Great Depression found it was cheaper to use jukeboxes and hire a disc jockey than to employ a live musician. In addition, the city changed zoning laws in such a way that club owners had to start paying a tax for each musician in the bands employed in the clubs. The merger of the union and the change in zoning laws helped accelerate the shift from live music to recorded music in Chicago, thereby further displacing Black musicians.

The Black musicians felt conflicted because they disliked segregation but also lamented the loss of venues. Philip Cohran, later the leader of the Artistic Heritage Ensemble of Chicago, migrated to Chicago from Mississippi in the mid-1950s. He remembered the South Side as a “kind of Mecca” where the musicians “could walk up and down the streets and hear brothers playing everywhere. . . .” Martin “Sparx” Alexander also migrated to Chicago in the mid-1950s. Like Cohran, Alexander recalled the South Side as a “paradise.” Buddy Guy, who arrived in the city at the same time, contended that the “hood was always going down.” All three men watched as boarded up buildings and housing projects replaced the Black arts “Mecca” on the South Side. They noted that everything appeared to become more desperate as the South Side music scene began to vanish. Indeed, by 1972, guitarist Buddy Guy feared there would be no blues clubs left on the South Side. He purchased the Checkerboard Club, at 423 East 43rd Street, to prevent the total disappearance of the club scene. Later, he discovered that Muddy Waters’s old house, 4339 South Lake Park, was in danger of being torn down. Guy purchased it as an homage to his late mentor and in an attempt to preserve the music history of the community.

The musicians’ despair over the diminishing music scene was part of the larger anguish being felt by the Black community caught up in the growth of Chicago’s modern ghetto in the 1950s and 1960s. The community’s feelings were palpable in songs such as “Political Prayer Blues” from 1958, which transformed Psalm 23 and the Lord’s Prayer into a protest song against President Eisenhower: “He maketh me to lie down upon park benches . . . Yes, and surely hard times follow me . . . And I will dwell in a housing project for the rest of my life.” The replacing of the South Side
Map 8. This map shows the distribution of Chicago’s African American population in reference to the city’s public-housing projects in the mid-1950s. When compared with the music-venues map (chapter 2), it is apparent that the core of the historic “black belt” and Black music area—approximately 31st Street to 55th Street—was becoming the core of the projects. The building of the projects required the demolishing of Black neighborhoods. As the neighborhoods were destroyed, many of the music venues were destroyed as well. Based on Urban League and census maps housed in the Map Library, Regenstein Library, University of Chicago. Created by the author.
streetscape with housing projects, and the subsequent growth in crime and poverty, became defining characteristics of the South Side in the 1960s.

The existence of the “Mecca” for musicians on the South Side had stemmed in no small part from the Black union local’s defense of and investment in the community. Regrettably, the post-merger years did not see the same level of black leadership and involvement in the union. There was great difficulty convincing the former members of Local 208 to run for office in the merged union. This resulted in the dissidents being perennial candidates as they worked to keep an African American voice in the union. The former leaders of Local 208 did not run for office because of their age; they felt others saw them as holding up the merger to retain their power. By 1993, the two Black delegates to the union’s national convention, positions provided by the merger agreement and the union’s subsequent civil-rights measures, were the only two African Americans serving in elected positions in Local 10–208.

There were those among the Black musicians who were so angry at the way the union functioned, and the power of the white musicians, that they felt they could live without the union. In 1965, as Chicago’s Black union local was imploding and the Black public sphere seemed to be failing, a group of African American jazz musicians gathered around a South Side kitchen table to discuss the future of Black music and the Black public sphere in the city. The group, led by cellist and pianist Muhal Richard Abrams, recognized that Chicago was no longer the creative center of jazz as it had once been because of the club closures on the South Side and the lack of Black-friendly venues in the rest of the city. They knew that if they were going to improve the situation for African American musicians, then they were going to have to create new opportunities for musicians. The group that emerged from these meetings was the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians, or AACM. The group could count among its members some of the most prominent jazz musicians of the second half of the twentieth century, including Lester Bowie, Philip Cohran, and Anthony Braxton.

In imagining the new system of venues and a new kind of professional organization, the AACM members agreed on nine goals. Central to these goals was the recognition of the need for music-education programs that cultivated Black youth and a mentorship program that paired younger musicians with older, experienced musicians. The training that Abrams and the others envisioned would be free, would promote the traditions and achievements of Black music history, and would contribute to the programs at the Abraham Lincoln Center—a community performance
hall in the “black belt.” They hoped that in taking on the role of educators musicians would become community leaders and role models. It was no accident that they invested in education. Many of the members had been students of Walter Dyett’s at DuSable High School. The relationship with Dyett taught them to have racial pride and showed them the power of education to fight the effects of Chicago’s racism and poverty.102

AACM members agreed that their role in the community would be one of “uplift.” The music they played at their shows would be original compositions. At the performances they would not allow drinking or smoking, which annoyed the music press. Also, they refused to perform in taverns and nightclubs. Instead, the AACM music movement was built in concert halls and community centers. They raised the money to rent the halls through community donation drives and they promoted the concerts themselves by distributing leaflets. Therefore, they managed to cut out the union, the club owners, and the promoters.103

Just as there were musicians who began to imagine a Black public sphere without the union, there were those who lamented the loss of the union local they had helped to build. An example of that loss was the sale of the Black local’s business building following the merger. The headquarters of the merged local were the offices that Local 10 had used for decades, which meant that the union leadership was located in what had been traditionally white territory. The location of the local’s headquarters was significant because it symbolized the continued power of the white leaders and contributed to the lack of Black participation in elections and meetings. With the sale of the building, the Black musicians had lost a place to meet and look for jobs, their credit union, a place where they socialized, and a place where they could rehearse. In losing the building, they lost a large part of the Black cultural sphere, their community, as well as much of their status in the union.104

In the late 1980s, the last vestiges of Local 208 disappeared from the Chicago music landscape. The local had owned an apartment building that provided low-cost housing for musicians and their families, but the merged local had decided to sell the building. This was shocking to the former members of Local 208. They believed that the merger agreement guaranteed that the union would always own the building. In addition, they felt that the union was wealthy enough that it could provide social services to its members. The closing of the building meant that there would no longer be a neighborhood of musicians as there once was. Singer, songwriter, playwright, and poet Oscar Brown Jr. summarized the event by saying it was as if the building were being “integrated out of ex-
Figures 3 and 4. The top chart shows the falloff of membership in the union. The two highest years for membership were 1936–37, when Petrillo destroyed the last of the competing European ethnic unions and amalgamated their members into the AFM, and the World War II years, when large numbers of African American musicians were migrating to Chicago. The drop in membership rates can be attributed to the shift in the music industry to a bicoastal business model, the decline in significance of the union, and out migration as is demonstrated in the second chart. Based on a study of 1,983 AFM death files.
This kind of integration had been, of course, the greatest fear of the Black Local’s leaders.

In the early 1990s, Black musicians reflecting on the merger expressed further disenchantment with integration. Lefty Bates, one of the first men to join Red Saunders’s movement, argued, “The biggest mistake, when we merged, was the fact that they only asked for representation for 6 years. It should have been forever, or for a lifetime because there is not a single person to represent us down at Local 10–208 today.” Charles Walton, another key member of Saunders’s dissidents, summarized the merger by writing, “Blacks were not integrated into White locals, they were submerged.” Walton would later help the AFM develop anti-discrimination policies and practices; Hillard Brown, a drummer who had worked as Local 208’s business agent from 1954 to 1960, said, in the early 1990s, that he wished that leaders of Local 208 had dissolved the local, sold the local’s property, and distributed the profit from the sale among the members of the local. Brown also noted that when he had to go downtown to Local 10–208’s building to pay his dues, “It was a cold situation. You had a place to pay bills and get your receipt, but no place to socialize like we had been accustomed to having on 39th street [the former location of the Local 208 building], no exposure to other musicians.”

The feelings of disappointment continued to be expressed forty years after the merger. There are now Black musicians working throughout the city, but white musicians still fill the higher-paying jobs. The perceived lack of employment in classical music, something Black musicians had been fighting since Dett’s time, discourages young African American students from pursuing careers in symphony orchestras. For many, it is not a question of whether or not the racism is less overt or less institutionalized. What matters is that it still exists. For example, Morris Ellis, who found his start playing in Red Saunders’s orchestra and was one of the 200 original dissidents, was disgusted with the merger and its results. He recalled the merger as being “forced” on the Black local and in the end accomplishing nothing. In making this argument, he cited two facts. First, Ellis was angry over the lack of African Americans elected to the union board since the time of the merger. “And to me that’s a joke. A bad joke,” Ellis proclaimed. The second reason for viewing the merger as a failure was the lack of African Americans in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and on the symphony board. In reflecting on the history of discrimination and the lack of measurable improvements, Ellis angrily declared, “This is still the most segregated city in the world.”