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# “We Are Men:” Self-Determination Defense and Black Masculinity

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**“We Are Men:”  
Self-Determination Defense and Black Masculinity**

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**The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduate Association for African American History  
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# Intersectional Approach

- Provides one with another lens to understand history
- Angie Marie Hancock: 3 Types of Scholarship
  - Unitary
  - Multiple
  - Intersectional



# Defining American Masculinity

- Michael Kimmel: Power, Control, Autonomy
- Violence at the center
- “Traditional” roles of men
  - protecting home
  - protecting community

# Contestations of Masculinity

- Physical
  - Frederick Douglass
  - Issue of Interracial Rape
  - Lynching and Violence
- Institutional Efforts
  - Jack Johnson
  - Mann Act of 1910

# “Self-Determination Defense”

- Particular type of militarism
  - NOT revolutionary
  - Employing physical means if necessary to ensure the safety of their communities and themselves
  - Idea of protection also central to defining manhood

# Origins of “Self-Determination Defense”

- World War II: Double V Campaign
- Hypocrisy of “Four Freedoms”
- Black Soldiers
  - experience
  - leadership
- Collective Action at Home
  - Robert F. Williams



# Costs of Nonviolence

- Destructive to Black male masculinity
  - Denied ability to protect community, families, and oneself
  - Physical surrender of power (defining feature of masculinity)

# Deacons for Defense

- Quintessential organization that employed “Self-Determination Defense”
- Conscious of connection between self-defense and masculinity
- Forging a new identity

# “Myth of Nonviolence”

- Lance Hill
  - By end of 1962 SNCC, CORE, and SCLC had failed at securing major reform
  - Contends that after Birmingham Riots in May of 1963, all nonviolent protests carried a threat of physical retaliation by Blacks
- Idea of separation of nonviolence and self-defense
  - self-defense: also had ability of moral suasion

# Significance

- Project helps to form a more complete intersectional approach on American society
- Larger Narrative:
  - Recognition of relationship between power and masculinity → Self-Determination Defense → reclamation of manhood → recognition of humanity

“Without a struggle,  
there can be no progress .”

-Frederick Douglass

