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Geneva Bryant and Marie and Virginia Shipp shop at the Co-Op

Blacks' Co-Op Grocery Has Low Prices, but High Aims

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Just a block from the Rev. Albert B. Cleage's church on Linwood is a food store, seemingly much like most other neighborhood groceries in town.

But if there is any place in Detroit where the meaning and muscle of black power is present, it is behind the walls of that store.

What they do in there is sell food.

Gerber's Baby Food is 12 cents a jar. Hot dogs are 49 cents a pound. Milk is 29 cents a quart, which the store operators concede is too high, but volume buying of perishables is one thing the Black Star Co-op, Detroit's first black co-operative market, can't quite do yet.

For the Ashanti Co-operative Corporation, the non-profit group of black businessmen and community activists who run the co-op, is thinking expansion, and they just can't cut prices any lower just now. There is something more important at hand than the price of milk.

THERE IS the feeling that the black community on the west side doesn't get the kind of treatment it should from the other grocery stores—many of them white owned—that serve the neighborhood.

There is the feeling that the black community around Linwood and the rest of inner city Detroit would

rather buy from other black people these days.

And there is above all the principle that co-op manager Mrs. Geneva Bryant recites: "We are trying to get the community to shop with us in order to control our own community."

That single sentence, from a very busy lady who was promoted from store butcher to run the place, is self-determination, black power, reduced to its essence. The more black businesses that are established in black areas of Detroit, that principle says, the more black areas of Detroit will be real communities, responsible to their people.

The Black Star Co-op, 7525 Linwood, is one of the few successful efforts so far among a number of grass-roots organizations that seek to lead the inner city west side, and its continuing success is the work of a 10-man executive board of rights activists, black politicians and concerned Negro businessmen.

SINCE IT opened Feb. 1, the co-op has provided its neighborhood with generally low prices, courteous employees, a butcher who cuts to order, fresh produce and perishables, well-stocked shelves . . . and a cause.

And some of the most cause-conscious people around the store are its half-dozen employees, several of

them young people. They don't make enough money yet, Mrs. Bryant says, but she adds: "They want this market to go, and once it does, all the wages will be increased. They know this is the first step in a struggle."

The signs of the struggle are evident. A card taped to a cash register still promotes a drawing held "to commemorate July 23" with a first prize of 15 steaks. "War in America," written by radical separatist Brother Imari (Richard Henry) is for sale under the glass counter top, and several African blouses hang on display above a case full of Afro jewelry.

But the real power of the co-op comes through in a deeper way when stock boy Ivy Coston chats about the customers. "I know one woman," he says, "who shops here and down at the A&P on the boulevard. She says our peaches are higher, but our greens are cheaper and better. She shops around."

The Black Star Co-op is a new alternative on the west side, for that woman shopper and for other black people seeking a way to make their neighborhoods their own.

More co-operative efforts are being planned by other groups on both sides of the Inner City, small beginnings of black economic control, but beginnings. The Black Star is the first one, and six months along, it is, working.