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Beating Down the Fear: The Civil Sphere and Political Change in South Carolina, 1940-1962

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BEATING DOWN THE FEAR: THE CIVIL SPHERE AND POLITICAL CHANGE IN
SOUTH CAROLINA, 1940-1962

by

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DEDICATION

To Dana, Kate, and Walter

... and to Louis and Ella and Miles and Boxer and the rest of the team

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank the faculty members at the University of South Carolina School of Journalism and Mass Communications. They accepted my dual role as professor and student and served me well as mentors, instructors, colleagues, and friends. That starts with Dean Charles Bierbauer, now a twice-former colleague and a class act in every way. I would be happy to work with Charles a third time if the opportunity arose. I took my first history course from Kenneth H. Campbell, and I am grateful to Ken for his guidance throughout graduate school. I also want to thank Andrea Tanner, John Besley, Rick Stephens, Sei-Hill Kim, Ran Wei, Jay Bender, Erik Collins, Carmen Maye, Keith Kenney, August Grant, Xiaofeng Li, and Sandra Hughes for their assistance along the way. Carol Pardun has been an especially helpful boss and mentor, and I consider her a model of what it means to be a scholar, educator, administrator, and friend. Patricia Sullivan from the USC history department has been an invaluable guide to African-American history and a generous supporter as well. Most of all, however, I want to thank my adviser, Kathy Roberts Forde, who spent an enormous amount of her time and energy making my work better. Kathy is a brilliant and demanding scholar – and an even better friend. I am honored to have worked with her.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation contends that print culture – newspapers in particular – played a decisive role in launching the black civil rights movement and shaping the white response to it during the middle of the twentieth century. Focusing on South Carolina, this study is the first to use civil sphere theory and frame analysis to explore the role of cultural expression in the political struggle over black equality in the years immediately before and after World War II. It shows how African-American editors and other activists made strategic use of the society’s symbolic codes concerning justice, freedom, and liberty to elicit empathy from potential allies and break down opposition to political and social acceptance. At the same time, this dissertation examines how some whites employed an equally powerful “discourse of repression” to limit the black movement’s gains and help launch the modern conservative movement. By placing cultural symbolism and interpretive communication at the heart of civic life, this study reveals the inextricable link between mass media, public opinion, and formal political power. In doing so, it raises new questions about the received historical narrative of a fully emerged professionalized, independent, and nonpartisan daily press in the United States by the second half of the twentieth century. This dissertation reveals a deep connection between South Carolina’s white press and partisan politics in the state well into the 1970s. Yet it also shows how partisan journalists had begun to hide their activism from the public to maintain their status as independent sources of information and interpretation.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE CIVIL SPHERE

In 1935, a young African-American journalist named John Henry McCray returned home from college determined to launch a newspaper and help build a civil rights movement in South Carolina. It was an audacious and seemingly quixotic goal. Mired in the depths of the depression and demoralized by forty years of violent white supremacist rule, black South Carolinians in the mid-1930s struggled each day merely to survive. Political and social activism appeared to be luxuries they could not afford.¹

Northern civil rights activists who visited during the Depression described the state's African-American communities as listless and quiescent. They were "trapped in a morass" of economic exploitation and political hopelessness.² The organizations that served as outlets for black civic life – churches, schools, and NAACP chapters – had grown either defeatist or moribund.³ The issue of white supremacy appeared to be settled. White politicians had grown so confident of this that they no

¹ I.A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina, 1895-1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1975), 201-267; Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 498-511; Edwin D. Hoffmann, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina, 1930-1939," *Journal of Negro History*, 44, 4, October 1959, 346-369; Theodore Hemmingway, "Beneath the Yoke of Bondage: A History of Black Folks in South Carolina, 1900-1940," Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1976.

² Hoffmann, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Civil Rights in South Carolina," 347.

³ Rev. Robert W. Bagnall, "Traveling through the Deep South," *The Crisis*, April 1932, 110-114.

longer bothered to emphasize the issue when campaigning for office.⁴

Within a dozen years, McCray's newspaper, working with a small group of allies at the NAACP, had helped overturn this culture of accommodation, and a black community that had appeared to be politically somnolent embraced civic engagement. NAACP membership increased from 800 members in the mid-1930s to more than 14,000 in 1948, with a centralized state conference of branches coordinating political activity across the organization's 86 chapters.⁵ McCray and his allies launched a political organization, the Progressive Democratic Party, designed to challenge the all-white Democratic Party and give blacks a voice in state politics. The PDP is credited with boosting black voter registration from 3,500 in early 1944 to more than 50,000 by 1947.⁶ At the center of this civic activism stood McCray's newspaper, the *Lighthouse & Informer*, a radical voice that demanded black activism and ridiculed those African Americans who appeared to accept second-class status.

The new political movement won a string of victories in the courts and even at the ballot box across the 1940s. Black South Carolinians overturned the state's system of unequal pay for black teachers in South Carolina, won the right for black voters to participate in Democratic Party primaries, influenced the outcome of a US Senate

⁴ Bryant Simon, "Race Relations: African American Organizing, Liberalism, and White Working-Class Politics in Post-War South Carolina," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, eds., Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 239-259; Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 220-225; Jack I Hayes, *South Carolina and the New Deal*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

⁵ Hoffmann, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Equal Rights in South Carolina," 346.

⁶ Hanes Walton, Jr., *Black Political Parties: An Historical and Political Analysis* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 74-75.

election, and filed the school desegregation suit that would lead to *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court case outlawing segregation in public schools. These successes served as a turning point in the political history of the state and the nation. As one historian put it, the NAACP activists who led the fight in South Carolina in the 1940s served as the “vanguard” of the massive civil rights struggle that would emerge across the South the following decade.⁷

Historians have grappled with the question of why a black political movement planted in the inhospitable terrain of late 1930s South Carolina managed to take root and grow. Some have traced its origins to Roosevelt’s election when, as Patricia Sullivan has argued, New Deal activism “stirred the stagnant economic and political relationships” that had ruled the South since the turn of the century.⁸ Demographic, economic and social changes also played a role. The great migration accelerated in the 1930s, with more than 400,000 blacks moving north during the decade. This increased the number of African American voters in key industrial states such as New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. The rising black political clout in the New Deal era increased pressure on Roosevelt and the Democrats to begin to confront the party’s powerful southern wing on the issue of race. Additionally, industrialization and urbanization finally began to take hold in the South. With the arrival of the boll weevil and the collapse of the cotton crop in the late 1920s, African Americans in search of jobs began moving to cities. Literacy rates continued to increase, and the proximity of urban life facilitated political organization. Finally, the rise of fascism in Europe and the US entry into World War II

⁷ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 128.

⁸ *Ibid*, 3.

further destabilized the sedimented social, political, and economic structures in the South.⁹

Yet social forces alone do not ensure political change. As sociologist Jeffrey C. Alexander points out, a social movement's success also requires "leaders who provide these social forces with effective rhetoric and voice."¹⁰ The battle over civil rights in South Carolina across the 1940s and 1950s was more than a litany of court cases and political campaigns. It was a cultural contest as well, with black activists and white segregationists struggling to define the meaning of citizenship and establish the boundaries of civic life. By tracing the discourse that flowed through print culture – books, magazines, and, most importantly, newspapers – this study examines the shifting cultural landscape that helped foster political change in South Carolina. As the historian Jill Lepore notes, "the rise of American democracy is bound up in reading and writing," and the nation's narrative always remains open to debate.¹¹ The story of the black push for civil rights and the white response to it was political in nature, but understanding why change occurred at that particular moment requires a deeper inquiry than narrow political

⁹ Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue: The Depression Decade* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 67; Nancy Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, "False Friends and Avowed Enemies: Southern African Americans and Party Allegiances in the 1920s," in *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights*, eds., Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, Bryant Simon (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 219-238; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*; Lau, *Democracy Rising*; Hayes, *South Carolina and the New Deal*; Robert A. Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1974); John Kyle Day, "The Southern Manifesto: Making Opposition to the Civil Rights Movement" (PhD, Diss., University of Missouri, 2006), 4.

¹⁰ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Performance of Politics: Obama's Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 3.

¹¹ Jill Lepore, *The Story of America: Essays on Origins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012), 3.

history can offer. With its focus on the role of print culture, this study asks how American democracy was debated, contested, and re-imagined in the years immediately before and after World War II, when the state's black citizens began to rise up en masse, and white leadership struggled to respond. It searches for answers in one small, Deep South state. Yet the findings help illuminate the cultural struggle at the heart of all democratic life.

By treating culture as an independent and autonomous force, this study highlights the inextricable link between the mass media, public opinion, and formal political power. In doing so, it relies on Alexander's concept of the civil sphere, a social theory that reconsiders the nature of civil society. Across the 1940s and 50s, black and white leaders in South Carolina crafted narratives designed to shape the meaning of the civil rights struggle in the South. Both sides used the tools of mass communications and political symbolism to try to define their causes and link them to the traditions and ideals of the nation's democratic origins. In doing so, both pursued a singular goal: to win the hearts and minds of potential allies within the larger democratic public. For it was this democratic public – what Alexander calls the “civil sphere” – that would determine the outcome of the African American battle for equal rights in South Carolina and the nation.

Alexander's theory of the civil sphere helps us understand the dynamics of political change in the mid-twentieth century, when rapid modernization began to connect local and national as never before.¹² The spread of mass transportation and mass media early in the century had helped spawn a migration that altered the nation's demographics and strengthened the political and cultural connections between North and South. By the

¹² For detailed explanation of civil sphere theory, see: Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Civil Sphere* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006); Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Interpretation of *The Civil Sphere*,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 48 (2007): 641-659; Alexander, *The Performance of Politics*.

1940s, the isolation that had benefited the white South during the rise of Jim Crow had given way to a more interconnected society. Cultural and political shifts in one region were now more likely to exert influence in another. This study reveals the significant roles the black and white communities in South Carolina played in reshaping the politics of the nation across the second half of the twentieth century. In the late 1930s, black activists in the state began plotting the development of black civil sphere capable of delivering its own interpretation of public events. Their success would help launch the broader civil rights movement of the 1950s and early 1960s, a movement that overturned Jim Crow rule in the South. The white response to this movement – strongly influenced by South Carolina activists – would help fuel the growth of the modern conservative movement, a partisan political realignment that continues to dominate the nation’s civic life.

Examining the civil rights struggle in South Carolina through the lens of Alexander’s theory of the civil sphere opens up new ways of understanding the role of culture in fostering political change. In democratic societies, members of the mass public construct narratives to help make sense of the world, and through these narratives they create what Alexander calls the “social solidarity” that comprises the democratic public. It is within this civil sphere that democratic communities determine membership; they decide who has the right to full citizenship and who does not. In Alexander’s view, the civil sphere is the one space where cultural expression and interpretive communication can overcome narrow self-interest in shaping how members of the society make meaning of their world. Those who have full membership in the solidarity of the civil sphere treat each other as equals, carry out political debate with mutual respect, and distribute power

based on the ability to persuade, not the strength to compel. In this sense, democracy is more than a mere form of government; it is, as John Dewey said, “a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.”¹³

In Alexander’s theory of civic life, the democratic ideals of the nation live on through those who are members of the democratic public. Within this solidary civil sphere, citizens share a deep emotional connection to the values embedded in the culture of the society. Powerful symbolic codes that grew out of the nation’s founding documents convey these democratic ideals across society and help enhance a shared sense of community. Much like Gunnar Myrdal’s argument in *An American Dilemma*, his massive study of “the Negro question and American democracy,” Alexander’s civil sphere theory suggests the existence of an “American Creed,” a subtle but widely held belief that “the American way” is linked to such notions as “liberty,” “justice,” and “fair play.”¹⁴

Yet Alexander emphasizes that the civil sphere can never be achieved in its ideal form. Members of the democratic public who comprise the civil sphere also participate in other, anti-civil spheres that surround and frequently invade the civil sphere. These spheres include the market, the state, and racial, ethnic, and gender affiliations. In other words, members of the civil sphere do not always act and think according to the ideals of the democratic nation. The cultural codes that appeal to the society’s democratic ideals have been used to depict out-groups as uncivil and threats to the democratic nation.

¹³ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Free Press, 1916, 1966), 87, as quoted in Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 37.

¹⁴ First published in 1944, Myrdal’s massive two-volume study was funded by Ford Foundation and included the work of hundreds of scholars. See: Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Question and American Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944); See also: Walter Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience: Social Engineering & Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1990).

Throughout history, members of the democratic public have also used the civil sphere as a means of exclusion.¹⁵

Alexander's theory of the civil sphere places communications at the heart of civic life. The mass media do more than merely transmit information to the public. Through acts of selection and emphasis, they convey interpretations of civic life that help define what "actually goes on" in society.¹⁶ These interpretations play a decisive role in shaping public opinion and promoting cultural and political change. In making these claims, Alexander links his notion of the civil sphere to the constructivist paradigm that has dominated media effects and communications studies for the past three decades.¹⁷ This

¹⁵ Alexander, "Interpretation of *The Civil Sphere*," 641-659.

¹⁶ Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 5.

¹⁷ For an overview of media effects research, see: Dietram A. Schufele, "Framing as a Theory of Media Effects," *Journal of Communication*, Winter, 1999, 103-118; On social construction of reality, see: Peter L. Berger & Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Social Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1978). On framing and frame analysis, see: Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Free Press, 1974); Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," *Science*, 211, 4481, 453-458; William A Gamson & Andre Modigliani, "Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power. A Constructionist Approach," *American Journal of Sociology* 95, (1989): 1-37; William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert M. Entman. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm," *Journal of Communication* 43, (April, 1993): 51-59; Kevin Caragee & Wim Roefs. "The Neglect of Power in Recent Framing Research," *Journal of Communication* 54, (February, 2004): 214-23. For more on framing and social protest movements, see: William A. Gamson, Bruce A. Fireman, & Steven Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1982); William A. Gamson, "Political Discourse and Collective Action," *International Journal of Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 1 (January, 1988): 219-244; David A. Snow & Robert D. Benford, "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization," *International Social Movement*

paradigm assumes mass media play a significant role in helping the public construct social reality. The media identify issues that comprise the public agenda, and through the process of framing, they help determine *how* the public thinks about those issues.¹⁶ Journalists and other communicators routinely make subjective decisions about which dimensions and characteristics of an issue deserve greater public scrutiny; they decide which angles to emphasize and which to downplay or ignore altogether.¹⁷ Through this selection process, the mass media offer interpretive cues that identify problems and propose solutions. In this way, they play an influential role in cultural contests over meaning-making; their framing of public events can help produce what Alexander describes as civil rupture or civil repair.¹⁸

Historians have documented the rise of the civil rights movement in South Carolina and the white backlash that it triggered.¹⁹ This study is the first, however, to use

Research 1 (January, 1988): 197-218; Snow & Benford, "Master Frames and Cycles of Protest," in *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*, eds., Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1992); Benford & Snow, "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611-639; Hank Johnston and John A. Noakes, eds., *Frames of Protest: Social Movements and the Framing Perspective* (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

¹⁸ Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 3-9.

¹⁹ For more on the black civil rights movement in South Carolina, see: Pater Lau, *Democracy Rising: South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality Since 1865* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2006); Wim Roefs, "Leading the Civil Rights Vanguard: John McCray and the Lighthouse & Informer, 1939-1954," in *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, eds. Charles M. Payne and Adam Green (New York: New York University Press, 2009); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1994); I.A. Newby, *Black Carolinians: A History of Blacks in South Carolina from 1865-1968* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973); Edwin D. Hoffman, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Civil Rights in South Carolina," *The Journal of Negro History* 44

civil sphere theory to explore the cultural struggle at the heart of that political contest. By focusing on the role of cultural symbolism and interpretive communication, this study sheds new light on what Alexander calls “the cultural structure at the heart of democratic life.”²⁰ It shows how an out-group can make strategic use of the society’s symbolic codes concerning justice, freedom, and liberty to elicit empathy from potential allies within a dominant group and break down opposition to political and social acceptance. At the same time, however, this study examines how opponents can employ an equally powerful “discourse of repression” to limit the out-group’s gains.²¹ South Carolina’s civil rights leaders won support in the 1940s by linking their struggle for equality to the most sacred traditions of the nation’s democratic heritage – what one black activist called “things of

(October, 1959); Barbara Aba-Mecha, “Black Woman Activist in Twentieth Century South Carolina: Modjeska M. Simkins,” (PhD diss., Emory University, 1978); Miles S. Richards, “Osceola E. McKaine and the Struggle for Black Civil Rights, 1917-1946 (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 1994); Erik S. Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow: The National Negro Congress and the Rise of Militant Civil Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2012); Theodore Hemmingway, “Black Press in South Carolina,” from *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, ed., Henry Louis Suggs (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983); Theodore Hemmingway, “Prelude to Change: Black Carolinians in the War Years, 1914-1920, *Journal of Negro History*, 65, 3 (Summer 1980), 212-227, 220.

For more on the white political response, see: Kari A. Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Bryant Simon, “Race Reactions: African American Organizing, Liberalism, and White Working-Class Politics in Postwar South Carolina,” in *Jumpin’ Jim Crow: South Politics from the Civil War to Civil Rights*, eds., Jane Dailey, Glenda Gilmore, and Bryant Simon (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Bryant Simon, “The Appeal of Cole Blease of South Carolina: Race, Class, and Sex in the New South,” *Journal of Southern History*, 62, 1 (Feb., 1996), 57-86; David Robertson, *Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes* (New York: Norton, 1994); Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson. *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond*. (Public Affairs. 2005); Nadine Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond and the Politics of Southern Change* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993); Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011).

²⁰ Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, ix.

²¹ Alexander, *The Performance of Politics*, 9. For more on the symbolic codes at the heart of democratic discourse, see: Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 53-67.

the heart, things eternal.”²² Stunned by the black movement’s early success, white leaders struggled during the following decade to devise a new interpretation of segregation that would resonate in the shifting cultural landscape of the larger nation. In the early 1960s, however, the state’s white leaders – particularly two white journalists – played a central role in the evolution of a new “color-blind” rhetoric that depicted blacks as uncivilized and anti-democratic and helped build a new political movement that would dominate national politics for the remainder of the twentieth century.

Additionally, this study breaks new ground in communication research by linking Alexander’s theory of the civil sphere to the concept of frame analysis. Alexander’s theory emphasizes the role of communicative institutions, particularly the mass media, in shaping public opinion. Within the civil sphere, political actors compete to persuade citizens to embrace particular interpretive frameworks and accept their version of social reality. Frame analysis allows us to examine this meaning-making process in specific detail. By combining civil sphere and framing, this study helps explain the powerful role print culture played in the effort by civil rights activists to challenge the dominant cultural and political norm in the middle of the twentieth century.

This study also raises new questions about journalism history and the generally accepted view that a professionalized, independent, and nonpartisan daily press had emerged in the United States by the second half of the twentieth century. This narrative of journalism history contends that the overwhelming majority of mainstream news outlets embraced the “monitorial” role, which emphasized a strict separation between

²² A.J. Clement Jr. to William D. Workman, Jr., WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Correspondence, 1948.

journalism and partisan political activism.²³ Yet the role of South Carolina's white press in resisting black equality contradicts this widely held view of how this professionalization process unfolded. Specifically, this study reveals a deep connection between press and partisan politics in the state well into the 1970s. Yet it also shows how partisan journalists had begun to hide their activism from the public to maintain their status as independent sources of information and interpretation. The evidence from South Carolina suggests the professionalization narrative that has grown so prominent in journalism history deserves closer scrutiny.

This study focuses on a social movement that emerged in the middle of the century, but its origins date back to 1903, when the scholar and activist W.E.B Du Bois published *The Souls of Black Folks*, an ambitious collection of essays that sought to explain “the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the twentieth century.”²⁴ As Du Bois wrote that line, white southerners were in the midst of a successful propaganda campaign that demonized African Americans as uncivilized and incapable of participating in the democratic process. As historians have noted, white Democrats rigged elections, yet blamed the increase in voter fraud on the presence of blacks in southern politics. They lynched and massacred, but convinced northern whites

²³ See: Clifford G. Christians, Theodore L. Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng, and Robert A. White, *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 115-116, 125; Richard L Kaplan, “From Partisanship to Professionalism: The Transformation of the Daily Press,” in *A History of the Book in America: Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 116-139; Michael Schudson, “Persistence of Vision – Partisan Journalism in the Mainstream Press,” in *A History of the Book in America: Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 140-150.

²⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: MuClurg and Co., 1903), vi.

that blacks were the root cause of the rising violence in the South. This “blame-the-victim” strategy came at a time when the United States was getting its first taste of empire. The phrase “white man’s burden” had begun to resonate with the nation’s political class after imperialist military campaigns placed the US government in control of brown-skinned populations in Cuba and the Philippines. The white southern campaign against black equality also received a boost from the rising pseudo-science of social Darwinism, which fueled the fear that inferior races would undermine and destroy western civilization.²⁵

The forces of white reaction in the South led a counter-revolution that imposed a strict racial caste system and denied southern blacks equal participation in the civil sphere. Southern whites achieved these goals with both tacit and explicit support of white northern public opinion. Three decades after the Civil War, whites in the North had grown weary of what they called “the Negro problem,” and the nation’s government ceded to white southerners the power to manage race relations in their region. As the progressive journalist Ray Stannard Baker noted despondently in 1908: The place of blacks has been settled, “and the less they are talked about the better.” Added historian Charles Beard, “Agitation of the Negro question had become bad form in the North.”²⁶ This shift in northern opinion had been codified in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the US Supreme Court ruling that gave racial segregation a constitutional seal of approval. Writing for the majority, Justice John H. Brown said, “If one race be inferior to the other

²⁶ Ray Stannard Baker, *Following the Color Line: An Account of Negro Citizenship in American Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, 1908); Beard quoted in George K. Hunton, *All of Which I Saw, Part of Which I Was* (New York: 1967), 25, as quoted in Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 5.

socially, the United States constitution cannot put them upon the same plane.”²⁷ Free from federal interference, white supremacist Democrats employed all means necessary, including a violent campaign of terrorism, to dislodge black Americans from southern politics and civic life.²⁸

By the New Deal era of the 1930s, however, when John McCray returned to South Carolina and began his civil rights work, cracks began to appear in the edifice of white solidarity on the question of race. Pressured by white liberal activists and black civil rights groups, the Roosevelt administration slowly began to defy the southern segregationist wing of the Democratic Party and take action in the interest of African Americans. These early steps were tiny and timid: Aid programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) offered relief to black communities; the president created an informal “black cabinet” to brief him on African American issues; and the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, began appearing in public with black leaders. By the late 1930s, the NAACP’s legal assault on Jim Crow began to chip away at the white supremacist ideology that undergirded the *Plessy* ruling.²⁹ In *Gaines v. Canada* in 1938, the US Supreme Court ordered the state of Missouri to either create a “separate but equal” law

²⁷ *Plessy v. Ferguson* 163 U.S. 567 (1896).

²⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1951); Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955); Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); George Brown Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South: 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Champaign-Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

²⁹ See also: Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s*. (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 4-5.

school for blacks or admit Lloyd Gains to the University of Missouri law school.³⁰ A decade later, in *Sweatt v. Painter*, the court ruled that the black law school in Texas was inferior and that forcing Heman Sweatt to attend it would violate his constitutional right to equal protection under the law.³¹ The doctrine of “separate of equal” – the legal cornerstone of Jim Crow rule – was coming under siege. The shifting view in the Northern civil sphere would embolden civil rights activists in the South.

Across the 1940s and 1950s, the white and black press in South Carolina would play influential roles in the struggle – both in the cultural contest over meaning-making and as direct participants in the state’s partisan politics. In the African American community, where a strategy of accommodation remained prevalent, a radical newspaper proposed a new path forward that required a different conception of what citizenship entailed. John McCray’s newspaper is significant in the history of the African-American press because of its location: The *Lighthouse and Informer* was one of the first to deliver a militant call for confrontation in the heart of the Deep South. In the Southwest, Roscoe Dungee’s *Oklahoma Black Dispatch* was one of the most radical black newspapers in the country during the early 1940s.³² And in the upper South, Louis E. Austin’s *Carolina Times* in Durham, North Carolina, challenged its readers to confront white supremacy.³³ But in the Deep South states stretching from Louisiana to the Atlantic coast, where the

³⁰ *Gaines v. Canada* 305 U.S. 337 (1938)

³¹ *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950).

³² Charles Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage During National Crises, with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1998), 51.

³³ Henry Louis Suggs and Bernadine Moses Duncan, “The Black Press in North Carolina,” in *The Black Press in the South*, 268-269.

threat of violence was constant, black voices were more cautious.³⁴ McCray's *Lighthouse and Informer* served as the tip of a political spear that included an aggressive NAACP presence in the state and a black political party determined to participate in the political process.

In response, white newspaper editors, often in collusion with influential political leaders, struggled to redefine the meaning of white supremacy and white democracy in the face of this new challenge. They would continue to pursue what one historian had called the “central theme of southern history” – the effort to keep the South as a “white man’s country.”³⁵ Yet the nation had changed since their forbears had fought the successful battle over white supremacy at the turn of the twentieth century. Now, they sought to tell a new story about white rule in the South that would restore its legal and intellectual credibility within the nation’s larger democratic narrative.

Charleston’s *News and Courier* occupied an influential seat at the center of the state’s white political world. In the 1940s, editor William Watts Ball was a throwback to the nineteenth century who participated openly in partisan politics. Yet the *News and Courier*’s political activism in the early 1960s, conducted mostly in secret, complicates the consensus scholarly view that a professionalized, independent, and nonpartisan press had spread even to the more rural South by then. The *News and Courier*’s editor, Thomas R. Waring Jr., and its chief political correspondent, William D. Workman, Jr., would play leading roles in crafting the legal strategy of interposition that would undergird the white South’s campaign of massive resistance to enforced integration in mid-1950s. When that

³⁴ Simmons, *The African American Press*, 65.

³⁵ Ulrich B. Phillips, “The Central Theme of Southern History,” *American Historical Review* 34 (October 1928), 35-42.

strategy began to fail, the two journalists turned their attention to partisan politics and would play integral roles in the rise of a conservative Republican Party in the South.

This study traces the origins of the South Carolina civil rights movement to early years of the twentieth century, a time often described as the “nadir” of African American history.³⁶ The *Plessy* ruling and Booker T. Washington’s acceptance of white political supremacy in the South had appeared to relieve white northerners of moral or constitutional obligations to intervene on behalf of African American equality. With notions of racial inferiority holding sway, blacks were mostly excluded from civic life and generally ignored. This isolation created an opportunity, however. As Alexander notes, out-groups that are excluded from mainstream society can use their isolation to create a counterpublic, a separate space that allows the out-group to communicate freely. Within the counterpublic, out-groups can share their own narratives, develop group consciousness, and begin to organize a plan of resistance.³⁷

In Chapter Two, this study shows how W.E.B Du Bois and the NAACP helped create a black counterpublic in the North with their communications efforts in the second decade of the century. At the same time, the great migration increased black populations living in proximity in northern cities, which created an audience for emerging black newspapers. The vigorous black press – particularly the *Chicago Defender* – delivered interpretations of white injustice that served to unite the new black counterpublic. Operating “under the veil” of segregation, the NAACP and the black press communicated a message of uplift and defiance that helped to create a robust and aggressive black civil

³⁶ Rayford Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (The Dial Press, 1954).

³⁷ Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 265-280.

society. Although never foreordained, the majority of this emerging black counterpublic eventually supported a strategy of integration and assimilation into the larger American society. Marcus Garvey and other popular black leaders of the era had called for a separatist, black nationalist strategy.³⁸ Under the NAACP's leadership, however, the black counterpublic embraced the democratic ideals of the dominant white society and used those ideals to argue for inclusion in the nation's civil sphere.

Du Bois' writing in the NAACP's monthly magazine, *The Crisis*, would attract a handful of black followers in South Carolina during World War I. Yet at that time, the black counterpublic in the North was not strong enough to rally northern public opinion in support of the fledgling civil rights effort in the state. White supremacists were able to crush the movement through the use of violence and economic retribution, without fear of northern intervention. By the mid-1930s, when young John McCray returned to South Carolina from college, the black counterpublic in the North had grown stronger. Though still an out-group, it had won more empathetic white allies and had begun to influence the federal government and other institutions of power, particularly the white press. Yet in 1937, when McCray sought to launch a new civil rights movement in South Carolina, cultural ghosts from the past haunted his efforts. He would commit an act of accommodationism that would undermine his credibility in the small but growing black counterpublic in the state. Three years later, he would join forces with NAACP activists and turn his newspaper into "a fighting organ" that would be used to fuel the growth of a black counterpublic capable of challenging white supremacy in South Carolina.

³⁸ For more Garvey's influence and the debate over integration versus separation, see: Steven Hahn, "Marcus Garvey, the UNIA, and the Hidden History of African Americans," in *The Political Worlds of Slavery and Freedom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 115-162.

Chapter Three uses frame analysis to detail the effort by McCray and his allies at the *Lighthouse and Informer* to unite and mobilize that emerging black counterpublic in the 1940s. The legacy of Washington's accommodationism remained strong in the state, and the fear of white retribution was pervasive. McCray and his allies employed what William Gamson has called a "collective action frame" to unite the black community behind a strategy of direct confrontation with white supremacy.³⁹ The *Lighthouse and Informer* employed the notion of "autonomous freedom," a concept that linked political activism to personal growth and self-fulfillment.⁴⁰ The newspaper claimed citizenship could never be won through negotiation but must be earned through struggle with white supremacy. The *Lighthouse and Informer* ridiculed black leaders who persisted in calling for accommodation with white rule and demanded the black community embrace the protest strategy.

During this period, the growing black civil society in the North influenced the fight for civil rights in South Carolina. The movement's rhetoric helped attract a key white ally, US District Judge J. Waites Waring of Charleston. Once a member in good standing of the state's white Democratic Party, Waring's rulings in favor of the NAACP and civil rights would be instrumental in bolstering the movement in South Carolina. At the same time, public opinion in the North had tempered southern white support of state-sanctioned violence. In 1947, the state's young governor, J. Strom Thurmond, would represent this change by calling in the FBI to investigate and indict white cabdrivers accused of lynching a black man near Greenville. The all-white jury eventually acquitted

³⁹ William A. Gamson, Bruce A. Fireman, and Steven Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (Homewood, Ill.:Dorsey Press, 1982).

⁴⁰ Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 26-27.

the men, but Thurmond's rhetoric denouncing lynch law and his call for federal intervention to combat it signaled a radical change in the attitude of white leadership in South Carolina. Southern whites – even the famously segregationist Strom Thurmond – were increasingly concerned about public opinion in the North.

Chapter Four traces the dominant ideology of the white press in the state and examines its treatment of the rising civil rights movement. Led by William Watts Ball, the editor of the *Charleston News and Courier*, the state's major newspapers embraced an aristocratic form of conservatism that had its origins in the state's planter-class elites who had helped overthrow Reconstruction in the 1870s. Ball had been editor of both the *Greenville News* and *The State* in Columbia before settling at the *News and Courier* in 1927. Like the old elites, Ball was obsessed with the notion of hierarchy in society; he believed all classes had their "place," with aristocratic elites in charge and working class whites near the bottom, just one step above the former slaves. Ball had opposed the rise the reform movements led first by "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman and later by Cole Blease because they empowered working-class whites and had displaced the planter-class leadership in the state. Ball was a white supremacist, but he disliked politicians who demonized African Americans to unite working-class white voters. Ball believed blacks were clearly inferior to whites and thus posed no real threat to white rule. Taking Ball's lead, the major white newspapers mostly ignored the earlier stirrings of the civil rights movement in South Carolina, a decision that provided McCray and his allies more time to unite the black counterpublic and gather resources before facing a concerted white backlash.

Ball's paternalistic view of race relations dominated the editorial pages of the state's major newspapers well into the 1940s. The *News and Courier* and *The State* viewed local blacks as unworthy of serious attention. Therefore, they mostly ignored the local civil rights movement across the early 1940s. Ball focused his anger on Washington, where he believed New Deal policies were destroying the economy and undermining the natural hierarchy of American democracy. The editor's paternalistic views faded, however, when it became clear that the local civil rights movement had strong support in the North. In 1948, when President Harry Truman became the first president since Reconstruction to propose civil rights legislation, Ball helped persuade Thurmond to join the Dixiecrat revolt against the national Democratic Party and run for president against Truman. Formally called the States' Rights Party, the Dixiecrats tried to link their campaign to the Tenth Amendment and the constitution's prohibition against an intrusive federal government. By election day, however, the party's rhetoric bemoaning "mongrelization" and "racial purity" had further undermined the image of white segregationists in the northern civil sphere.

In Chapter Five, South Carolina's most prestigious politician emerges to deliver a new narrative, one that downplays white supremacy and promises both states' rights and good race relations. In 1950, following the failure of the Dixiecrat campaign, James F. Byrnes – a former US representative, senator, Supreme Court justice, and secretary of state – came out of retirement to win the governorship of South Carolina. He unveiled an expensive school equalization plan designed to serve two purposes. Byrnes wanted to strengthen the argument in favor of *Plessy's* "separate but equal doctrine" and undermine the NAACP's legal effort to challenge school segregation in court. At the same time, he

hoped to shape northern public opinion by presenting a new narrative of southern white reasonableness and generosity in its treatment of African Americans. In doing so, he hoped to restore support for the South in the northern civil sphere. The elder statesman had been around Washington for decades, and he crafted his message carefully to appeal both to white southerners and his former colleagues on Capitol Hill. Even the lone liberal editor in South Carolina praised Byrnes as a voice of moderation and reason. But Byrnes was a politician from an earlier era; he had no experience dealing with a committed black political movement in South Carolina. A month before Byrnes' inauguration, the NAACP had filed suit on behalf of plaintiffs in Clarendon County who claimed segregated schools were unconstitutional and should be outlawed in America. Byrnes assumed local African Americans would drop the case in return for his promise to spend tax dollars to upgrade black schools. Yet the black counterpublic in South Carolina was now united and engaged, with growing national support; it was unwilling to accept such half measures. McCray's *Lighthouse and Informer* called the equalization plan a frantic effort "undertaken in desperation" to fool Northerners. He assured African Americans in South Carolina that they would win the Clarendon County case, which would eventually reach the Supreme Court as one of five cases merged under the name of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

The final three chapters focus primarily on two influential white journalists and their prominent roles in shaping political strategy in the post-*Brown* years in South Carolina. The black counterpublic that W.E.B Du Bois and the NAACP had helped launch at the turn of twentieth century had grown dramatically during and immediately following World War II. The black community's interpretations of public events now

received widespread attention in parts of the larger white society. By the mid-1950s, the northern white media had discovered the civil rights story in the South, and their depictions of the Emmett Till murder and other acts of southern violence and intransigence began to fuel public outrage. Buoyed by this new support from the North, the civil rights movement grew bolder in the South. Faced with this new reality, the editor of the *Charleston News and Courier*, Thomas R. Waring, Jr., and its chief capital correspondent, William D. Workman, Jr., would help formulate and implement the white response. In addition to covering the news and commenting on it, they would work behind the scenes to help shape the white community's "massive resistance" to the *Brown* ruling and to the larger push for black equality. They would help craft the "interposition" strategy to block integration of state schools, help establish the white citizens' council movement in South Carolina, and launch a campaign to break through the so-called "paper curtain" that they believed prevented northerners from hearing the white southern point of view.

By the late 1950s, when those efforts appeared to be failing to halt black progress toward full equality, Waring and Workman would play central roles in building a new political home for white racial conservatives in a revamped Republican Party. Waring's friendship with a northern journalist would lay the groundwork for this new political strategy. William F. Buckley Jr.'s family owned a home in Camden, South Carolina, and he and Waring had become friends during Buckley's visits to the state. In the pages of *National Review*, Buckley would experiment with arguments designed to unite southern segregationists like Waring with the magazine's antistatist and anticommunist readership. Buckley's initial attempt angered his conservative allies by boldly supporting a white

supremacist view that African Americans were intellectually inferior and incapable of participating in civic life. Like the Dixiecrat campaign a decade earlier, Buckley's argument fell outside the shifting norms of civil debate in northern civil sphere of late 1950s America.

Buckley and *National Review* would soften the argument to downplay racial inferiority and emphasize states' rights, individual liberty, and economic conservatism. With Waring, Workman, and their South Carolina allies playing a key role, the conservative movement would emerge as a significant political force in 1960, when Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater challenged the Republican Party's presumptive presidential nominee, Vice President Richard Nixon. Under Goldwater, the conservative movement would unite racial and economic conservatives by developing a "color-blind" ethos that claimed that race should no longer be an issue in US politics. Workman's book in defense of the South and segregation complicated this effort. Yet his run for the US Senate in 1962 attracted northern allies who shared his view that the black campaign for equality would undermine American democracy. William Loeb, editor of New Hampshire's largest newspaper, the *Union-Leader*, would praise Workman's effort and declare his support for converting the GOP into a "white man's party."⁴¹ Loeb's comment fell outside the new "color-blind" ethos of the conservative movement, but it suggests the dominant role the racial issue played in the evolution of the Republican Party in the early 1960s. By 1980, the party's presidential candidate, Ronald Reagan, would make states' rights a central theme of his campaign, and the conservative movement launched by

⁴¹ William Loeb to J. Edward Thornton, June 9, 1961, WDW Papers: Correspondence, 1961.

Buckley, Goldwater, and the South Carolinians would come to dominate US politics in the final two decades of the twentieth century.

Though geographically small, South Carolina has always played an outsized role in the racial history of the nation. In many ways it has served as ground zero for the most contentious and vexing issue of American democracy. From the debate over slavery at the constitutional convention, through the emergence of John C. Calhoun and the theory of nullification, the first shots at Fort Sumter, the rejection of Reconstruction, and, finally, the rise and fall of Jim Crow, the Palmetto State has taken the lead in the battle to stand still. No state has tried harder to rebel against the arrival of the modern world. And in each of these confrontations, South Carolina newspapers played significant roles, from the fire-eaters at the *Charleston Mercury* who preached secession in 1861 through John McCray's fight against black accommodationism and Thomas Waring's embrace of Goldwater Republicanism at the *News and Courier*. The history of journalism and print culture in South Carolina is inseparable from the state's politics. That South Carolina would be the first Deep South state in the twentieth century to experience such a robust civil rights movement speaks volumes about the courage and tenacity of the state's African American population. That such a movement would find success suggests South Carolina is a perfect venue for the study of the civil sphere, mass media, and the role of cultural forces in facilitating political change.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF A BLACK COUNTERPUBLIC

John Henry McCray's career as a civil rights leader in South Carolina appeared to be over less than two years after it had begun. McCray's newspaper, the *Lighthouse and Informer*, would eventually play a significant role in building and sustaining viable black protest in the state. The movement McCray helped create would challenge the racial status quo in South Carolina and effect political decision-making in the state and the nation across the 1950s and 1960s. Yet one of McCray's first public acts as a community leader appeared to be a groveling act of accommodation to white supremacist rule.

McCray had returned to Charleston in 1935 after graduating from college in Alabama, where he got his first taste of political activism. In a series of remembrances written late in his life, McCray recounted the story of a Talladega College professor who led a small group of frightened black students on a sit-in at a local soda fountain. The black professor demanded service for the group at tables that had been reserved for whites only. When the waiter refused, the professor pulled a thick stack of bills from his wallet and said, "Serve this, dammit!" Much to their surprise, the white manager complied, and the brief sit-in ended without incident.⁴²

Nonetheless, McCray complained about the apathy of Talladega students. The fledgling young journalist wrote angry editorials chastising their lack of commitment to

⁴² John McCray, "The Way It Was," *Charleston Chronicle*, July 25, 1981.

the cause of black equality.⁴³ He was especially outraged by their seeming indifference to the Scottsboro case, the racially charged conviction of nine African Americans accused of raping two white runaways in northern Alabama in 1931.⁴⁴ “We may not possess the financial or political influence to save the lives of the boys,” McCray wrote, “but we can offer our resentment to the manner in which many of the local and neighboring whites regard them.”⁴⁵

McCray liked to cite his childhood growing up in a nearly all-black village near Charleston as the source of his political commitment. Founded during Reconstruction, Lincolnton was created by congressman Richard Harvey Cain, an African Methodist Episcopal minister who wanted to create a haven for freed blacks in the South Carolina Lowcountry.⁴⁶ McCray and his family moved to the town in 1916, and both of his parents eventually served in leadership roles – his father as the town’s top law enforcement officer, his mother on the city council. McCray grew up seeing black people in positions of authority, both in Lincolnton and at the Avery Institute, the black high school in Charleston where he graduated as valedictorian. He often claimed that his childhood in

⁴³ John Henry McCray’s personal papers are housed at the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina. Hereafter referred to as JHM Papers.

⁴⁴ For details of the Scottsboro case, see Dan T. Carter, *A Tragedy of the American South* (Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

⁴⁵ John H. McCray, “The Arraignment of Student Inertia,” *The Mule’s Ear* 11, no. 3, February 1935, in JHM Papers.

⁴⁶ Christine W. Hampton and Rosalee W. Washington, *The History of Lincolnton, South Carolina* (Booksurge.com, 2007).

what he called “black-ruled” Lincolnville instilled in him the sense of black pride and assertiveness that allowed him to challenge white supremacy.⁴⁷

After college, McCray took a full-time job in Charleston at a black-owned insurance company, but he kept a hand in journalism and newspapering, working part-time at the *Charleston Messenger*, a black weekly. His aggressive reporting caught the eye of a local NAACP official who recruited McCray to help revive the civil rights organization’s moribund Charleston branch. One of his first acts as branch president – the creation of a defense fund to support a black man accused of killing a white police officer – drew mixed reaction from a cautious African American community. Some feared he was, in McCray’s words, “stirring up race trouble,” but the young activist believed the police had framed the suspect and that it was time for blacks in Charleston to confront local white authority.⁴⁸

By 1937, McCray had launched his own weekly newspaper, the *Charleston Lighthouse*. Through his journalism and his NAACP work, the 27-year-old activist had established himself as a strong new voice in Charleston’s black community, one that appeared determined to fight the racial status quo. Yet McCray’s next act stunned the NAACP leadership. He committed what appeared to be a groveling act of accommodation to white supremacist rule.

⁴⁷ John McCray, “The Way It Was,” *Charleston Chronicle*, Feb. 20, 1982, JHM Papers, Box 2, Folder 16; John McCray oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, February 18, 1985. Transcript in author’s possession.

⁴⁸ John Henry McCray, “The Way It Was,” *Charleston Chronicle*, Feb. 16, 1982, JHM Papers, Box 2, Folder 16.

In April of 1937, McCray wrote a letter to Charleston's leading white newspaper announcing his position on one of the NAACP's chief priorities: winning congressional approval of a federal anti-lynching law. The NAACP had been pushing for legislation that would empower the federal government to investigate and prosecute lynching since the organization's founding in 1909. Board chairman Louis Wright believed such legislation was central to the "fundamental citizenship struggle in the South."⁴⁹ By 1937, NAACP leaders had secured President Roosevelt's support for the Costigan-Wagner anti-lynching bill, and they believed they finally had a chance to overcome the barrier imposed by powerful white southern Democrats in the Senate. Yet in his letter, McCray criticized the "caustic methods" of the national NAACP. The young editor maintained that lynching would fade away on its own and black South Carolinians were "content to wait" for that to happen naturally. He said Charleston's African-American community wanted to "promote the basic principles of friendship" with whites. "Hence, we are not involved in the goings-on beyond the Mason-Dixon line," he wrote.⁵⁰ To make matters worse, McCray published his editorial as a letter to the editor of Charleston's *News and Courier*, a zealous supporter of white supremacy. The paper's famously conservative editor, William Watts Ball, had emerged as a leading critic of Roosevelt's New Deal policies in part because he believed they would undermine Jim Crow control over African Americans. Ball frequently accused the NAACP and other "outside agitators" of

⁴⁹ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 229.

⁵⁰ John H. McCray, "States the Position of Southern Negroes," *Charleston News and Courier*, April 13, 1937, clip in Charleston Branch File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers; Walter White to John H. McCray, April 24, 1937, Charleston Branch File, I-G-196; Louise Purvis Bell to the Editor, *Charleston News and Courier*, April 16, 1937, clipping in Charleston Branch File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers.

stirring up racial problems in the state; McCray's letter appeared to support Ball's claim.⁵¹

The backlash was immediate. NAACP Executive Director Walter White repudiated McCray, and angry members of the local NAACP branch convened a special meeting to vote McCray out as president. Less than two years after his return to South Carolina, McCray's reputation as a civil rights activist was in tatters. Among the state's small, close-knit group of black activists, he was marked as an accommodator, a man who wanted to appease white supremacy, not confront it. Louise Purvis Bell, a member of the Charleston branch's executive committee, delivered the harshest verdict. In her view, McCray was an "Uncle Tom and a traitor."⁵²

McCray never fully explained his decision to oppose the NAACP's campaign in favor of the anti-lynching law. In an oral history interview conducted in 1985, he dismissed the controversy without going into details. The editor claimed his critics in the local NAACP "had been sitting on their hip pockets doing nothing" and before his return to Charleston.⁵³ By the time of that interview, McCray wanted to be remembered as a fearless fighter for civil rights who had always challenged white supremacy, but in 1937 the young activist had clearly embraced a classic accommodationist strategy. McCray wanted to focus on black voting rights in Charleston, not federal law in Washington, and

⁵¹ Sid Bedingfield, "The Dixiecrat Summer of 1948: Two South Carolina Editors – a Liberal and a Conservative – Foreshadow Modern Political Debate in the South," *American Journalism* 27, no. 3 (Summer, 2010), 91-114.

⁵² Louise Purvis Bell to Walter White, April 16, 1937, Charleston Branch File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers.

⁵³ John McCray oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, February 18, 1985. Transcripts in author's possession.

he believed the obsequious tone of his letter would put whites at ease and help persuade them to ease restrictions on voter registration.⁵⁴ He tried to ameliorate white concerns about black activism, to assure white supremacists that local black leaders wanted gradual reform without confrontation. With his letter, McCray signaled his desire to negotiate with white leaders over the pace of change in the Jim Crow South – a strategy he would ridicule just three years later, when his newspaper joined forces with NAACP activists to launch an aggressive and successful civil rights campaign.

The controversy surrounding McCray's act of accommodation was hardly unique in the black community in the Deep South at the time. The debate over how to respond to white oppression had vexed and divided African Americans since the end of Reconstruction. Booker T. Washington had been dead for 25 years when McCray launched his newspaper, but the strategy of accommodationism that Washington articulated in his famous Atlanta speech of 1895 remained influential among black elites across much of the Deep South. Washington proposed an accommodation with white supremacy to try to avoid an open war between the races that he knew his people could not win. He encouraged blacks to give up their rights to full citizenship and focus instead on economic development and racial uplift. To avoid conflict with whites, Washington remained vague about accommodation's ultimate goal. But for African Americans the strategy was clear: give up the immediate struggle for social and political equality, but obtain those rights over time through economic advancement.⁵⁵ Over the next three

⁵⁴ Hoffman, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Civil Rights in South Carolina," 368.

⁵⁵ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington. The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 218-228; Robert J. Norrell, *Up from*

decades, black Americans, North and South, debated the merits of Washington and his proposals for negotiating the Jim Crow South. The contours of that debate were never simple and clear-cut: accommodationists sometimes called for confrontation, and protesters occasionally practiced accommodation. In the late 1930s, however, most black southerners still accepted one basic premise of the accommodationist strategy: The white leadership in the South had the power and the will to use violent force against blacks with little fear of a northern backlash. A direct confrontation with white supremacists would be suicidal.

At times, the debate over accommodation and its use during the early years of Jim Crow has been simplified as a battle between two camps: Washington and his powerful Tuskegee Machine on one side, W.E.B Du Bois and the fledgling NAACP on the other.⁵⁶ With his 1895 “Atlanta compromise,” Washington came to represent accommodation and acceptance of white supremacy and Jim Crow rule. Du Bois, with his scathing attacks on Washington’s leadership, stood for protest and confrontation in the battle for full equality. In this interpretation of black history, the “Washingtonian accommodators” dominated during the early years of Jim Crow, but by Washington’s death in 1915, accommodationism had faded. The “Du Boisian protesters” took firm control of the black freedom movement and launched a slow but steady campaign of confrontation that

History: The Life of Booker T. Washington (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009), 122-135.

⁵⁶ The influential southern historian, C. Vann Woodward, presented this view in his seminal work, *Origins of the New South*, and Woodward’s student, Louis R. Harlan, advanced the theme in his influential two-volume biography of Washington. Also see Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington*, for a different version of this argument.

culminated in the civil rights victories of the 1960s.⁵⁷ Historian Michael Rudolph West describes the popular storyline this way: “after Washington, a break with the past, followed by forty years flowing of ‘the river of black struggle,’ rolling along inexorably toward Montgomery and Martin King.”⁵⁸

Historians have shown that black protest against Jim Crow rule never ceased during the first three decades of the twentieth century, and at times was far more robust and more organized than had been previously depicted.⁵⁹ Yet the prevailing narrative of the African American freedom struggle dispenses too easily with the impact and legacy of Washington and accommodationism. The strategy would undermine efforts to unite southern black communities for decades after Washington’s death in 1915. And at the turn of the century, the accommodationist argument would send an insidious message of acquiescence and defeat into the northern civil sphere, where white Americans were once again considering the plight of African Americans in the South. To combat the rise of Jim Crow, African Americans needed support from white allies within the nation’s larger democratic public. Washington’s apparent acceptance of the main tenants of Jim Crow

⁵⁷ August Meier uses the terms “Washingtonion accommodators” and “Du Boisian protesters” in his introduction to a 1969 re-release of: W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Negro Problem: A Series of Articles by Representative American Negroes of To-Day* (Arno Press and New York Times Books, 1969 (1903)), iii – quoted in Michael Rudolph West’s *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 26.

⁵⁸ West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington*, 28. For “the river of black struggle” quote, West cites Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), xix.

⁵⁹ See, for example: Blair L.M. Kelley, *Right to Ride: Streetcar Boycotts and African American Citizenship in the Era of Plessy v. Ferguson* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Paul Ortiz, *Emancipation Betrayed: The Hidden History of Black Organizing and White Violence in Florida from Reconstruction to the Bloody Election of 1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Nan Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

law – segregation and disfranchisement – stunted the effort to generate that support. Washington’s language of accommodation suggested blacks in the South accepted the Jim Crow arrangements in the South, thus alleviating white Northerners from moral and constitutional obligations to intervene on their behalf.

As a minority comprising roughly ten percent of the nation’s population, African Americans needed support from the majority population to win inclusion into mainstream society. In the antebellum period, black and white voices of the abolitionist press in the North had agitated against slavery. The abolitionist movement had mostly failed in its effort to generate widespread moral opposition to slavery among white northerners. But by the 1850s, majority opinion in the North had grown to resent the southern slave economy. The fear of slavery’s expansion had spawned a sectional political party in the North that was dedicated to halting the growing political and economic power of the southern slaveholder. Under the motto of “Free Soil, Free Labor, Free men,” the Republicans rallied white public opinion to support a war against the Southern slaveholders, and in its aftermath, a Republican Congress afforded African Americans full citizenship rights. For a brief time, blacks were allowed to participate fully in national civic life.⁶⁰

In the North, however, African Americans remained a small and dispersed minority. They lacked powerful communicative and political institutions – widely read

⁶⁰ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 2011); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction, American’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988); Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: Norton, 1983).

newspapers and magazines and strong party organizations – required to create a robust black civil sphere. Without these institutions, they struggled to develop strong group consciousness and disseminate their interpretations of public events, particularly concerning the chaos in the South. Without a developed civil sphere capable of fostering political engagement, blacks in the North had little means to exert influence in the dominant white society. In the South, African Americans comprised a much greater percentage of the population and they asserted their rights in a democratic civil sphere. Yet it was a democratic system maintained by the Union Army, one that was constantly under siege from southerners committed to restoring white rule in the region. When Reconstruction ended, and the last federal troops pulled out of the South in 1876, African Americans in the South lost their northern protector. Without the threat of federal force, blacks now depended solely on northern public opinion to restrain the southern white majority.

Washington’s 1895 “Atlanta compromise” address came in the midst of a counter-revolution launched by radical white supremacists determined to claim undisputed political power in the South. Led by men such as James K. Vardaman in Mississippi, Joseph Aycock in North Carolina, and “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman in South Carolina, these “reformers” represented small farmers and working-class whites who had suffered the most during a national economic downturn in the 1880s. As a young militia leader, Tillman had helped former planter and Confederate general Wade Hampton take power in South Carolina in the bloody and contested election of 1876. Although a white supremacist, Hampton had taken a more paternalistic approach to the former slaves. After taking office, he allowed African Americans to continue to vote and to hold some

government appointments. By 1890, Tillman had turned on Hampton and led the effort to seize power from the state's planter-class elites. In his campaign for governor, Tillman demonized blacks as an inferior and violent race incapable of assimilating into a civilized and democratic society. He blamed blacks for rising crime rates in the cities, for increased fraud at the polls, and for harboring an uncontrollable lust for white women. In the guise of protecting the honor of southern womanhood, Tillman and other radical white supremacists across the South launched a campaign of violence against blacks that turned public lynching into a common spectacle.⁶¹

With his Atlanta speech in 1895 and his acclaimed autobiography, *Up from Slavery*, published six years later, Washington articulated a strategy that captivated white America and, in the beginning, appeared to many blacks to be the best available course of action, given the dire circumstances. Washington shaped his compromise to appeal to three constituencies – southern white elites, Northern white industrialists, and African Americans. He wooed the planter-class elites with soothing language promising black acquiescence to the ways of the white South. He encouraged fellow African Americans to accept the traditions and “customs” of the South, including its “prejudices.” On the question of black resistance, Washington said black southerners should understand “that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly.”⁶² In later speeches, Washington went further, urging African Americans to worry less about white oppression and more about their own improvement. “I fear that the Negro race lays too much stress

⁶¹ See, for example: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 350-353.

⁶² Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 219.

on its grievances and not enough on its opportunities,” he said, opening up a line of conservative criticism that echoes to this day.⁶³ The paternalistic white elites in the South embraced Washington’s vision of a compliant black population eager to focus on economic growth rather than politics, but Tillman and the radical Democrats remained unimpressed. They considered African Americans an existential threat to white rule in the South, and they remained committed to the strategy of political and social exclusion.

In the North, Washington aimed his appeal at the conservative leaders of industry, not the liberal intellectuals and abolitionist organizers who had been the Negro’s allies during slavery and Reconstruction. In the New South, Washington said, industry would find a compliant black labor force eager to prove its value in the workplace. Washington’s philosophy of industrial education would generate skilled black workers who had been taught to care more about paychecks than politics. His vision of racial uplift called for southern blacks to measure their self-worth based on economic gain, not social advancement. In short, Washington’s proposed compromise asked blacks to accept a second-class level of citizenship in return for protection from white violence and an opportunity to prosper economically. Under this plan, Northern elites would fund Washington’s industrial education program in the South, and – in a key selling point for white northerners weary of “the Negro problem” – the North would be relieved of any moral or constitutional obligation to intervene in southern race relations.

It has been nearly a century since Washington’s death, yet his impact on African American history continues to stir scholarly debate. Woodward described Washington as

⁶³ From conservative black intellectuals such as Shelby Steele and Stanley Crouch, to conservative white politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Newt Gingrich.

“the leader of white opinion” and the man who established the “*modus vivendi*” of race relations in the New South.⁶⁴ Washington’s biographer, Louis R. Harlan, depicted the former slave as a “genuine black leader” who began with good intentions but who evolved into an opportunist who grew obsessed with power. Washington tailored his message of accommodation and racial uplift to fit the mood of white America at the turn of the century, Harlan argued, yet at its core Washington’s philosophy was little more than a “bag of clichés.” To study Washington as an intellectual missed the point: “Power was his game,” Harlan wrote, “and he used his ideas simply as instruments to gain power.”⁶⁵ In his 2009 book, however, Robert J. Norrell argues that that earlier historians overstated Washington’s popularity with southern whites and underestimated the daily threats he and fellow black southerners faced. They ignored the realities of Washington’s place and time, and they placed too much value on the efficacy of protest as the sole means of confronting injustice. In Norrell’s view, this naturally led them to canonize Du Bois as the moral center of African American intellectual life and Washington as the quisling leader who sold his soul for a few shiny coins from his white masters.⁶⁶

Washington’s effort to protect his people from overwhelming white violence may have been understandable, but his acceptance of second-class citizenship in the South reinforced one of white supremacy’s central arguments. In their propaganda campaign, Tillman and the radical white Democrats had depicted blacks as intellectually incapable

⁶⁴ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 356.

⁶⁵ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901*, preface; Harlan, “Booker T. Washington and the Politics of Accommodation,” in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, eds. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 2-18.

⁶⁶ Robert J. Norrell, *Up from History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009).

of performing their duties as citizens. Because they were so easily manipulated, Tillman said, black involvement in the political process would always lead to fraud and corruption. Washington's call for blacks to renounce politics and accept second-class citizenship seemed to support this worldview. For whites in the North, Washington's acceptance of southern "customs" allayed moral and constitutional questions concerning the disfranchisement and segregation of blacks in the South. Even though Washington privately opposed segregation and the Supreme Court's ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, his public acquiescence hampered efforts to generate sympathy and opposition in the Northern civil sphere. The accommodationist stance undermined the arguments of Du Bois and other intellectuals who believed the rise of Jim Crow violated the nation's democratic ideals, and it made it much harder for them to attract white allies they needed to mount an effective protest campaign.

Du Bois had initially supported Washington's 1895 "Atlanta compromise." The young professor sent Washington a note of congratulations and later praised Washington's accommodationist strategy in the *New York Age*. Washington's proposal could be "the basis of a real settlement between whites and blacks in the South," Du Bois wrote, "if the South opened to the Negroes the doors of economic opportunity and the Negroes co-operated with the white South in political sympathy."⁶⁷ As Washington's popularity and power grew, however, Du Bois grew more concerned. By 1901, Washington had become what Harlan called "the most powerful black minority-group boss of his time."⁶⁸ From his base at his Tuskegee Institute, Washington used his

⁶⁷ Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, 225.

⁶⁸ Louis R. Harlan, *Booker T. Washington. The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press), vii.

newfound fundraising prowess to develop a political network – the Tuskegee Machine – to empower his supporters and to punish those who dissented. He used his wellspring of white financial donations “to buy black newspapers and bend their editorials to his viewpoint, to control college professors and presidents ... to infiltrate the leading church denominations and fraternal orders.”⁶⁹

Described as a “poet and a prophet” who wrote with “brooding passion and brilliant pen,” Du Bois used his literary skills and access to print culture to launch a campaign to counter Washington’s growing strength as the dominant black voice in the nation’s civil sphere.⁷⁰ In a review of *Up From Slavery*, Washington’s popular autobiography, Du Bois noted that Washington’s call for political accommodation and industrial education were not original ideas but had been widely debated among southern blacks over the past decade. More importantly, Du Bois pointed out that despite his newfound fame among whites, Washington did not hold a monopoly on leadership in the black community. Following in the footsteps of Frederick Douglass, who died the same year Washington made his Atlanta speech, black editors William Monroe Trotter and Ida B. Wells had been using newspapers and other forms of print culture to deliver clarion calls for protest against second-class citizenship.

In 1903, Du Bois followed up with his masterpiece, *The Souls of Black Folks*, a series of probing essays that would help define the African-American experience in twentieth century America. Du Bois’ biographer, David Levering Lewis, described the book’s publication as an “epochal” event in African-American history, and the NAACP

⁶⁹ Harlan. *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader*, preface.

⁷⁰ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 367.

activist James Weldon Johnson claimed the work had a greater impact on the “Negro race than any other single book published since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.”⁷¹ Through his lyrical prose, Du Bois explored “the strange meaning of being black” in America, correctly predicting that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line.” In his opening essay, “Of Spiritual Strivings,” Du Bois lifted “the veil” shrouding the inner recesses of black life so that white Americans might understand “what it feels like to be a problem.” Black Americans who live within that veil, Du Bois argued, experienced a cultural and psychological “two-ness.” They were “an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”⁷²

It was in his third essay – “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” – that Du Bois resumed his criticism of Washington and his strategy of accommodationism. He would elaborate on the points he had first made in his review in *The Dial*. The paternalistic white southerners with whom Washington sought to compromise – the remnants of the old planter-class aristocracy – had lost political control, Du Bois contended. They were being replaced by a new generation of radical white Democrats who were less interested in accommodation with blacks than in their perpetual subjugation. Du Bois watched violence against black southerners increase while Washington’s public rhetoric of accommodation and acceptance remained unchanged. By demanding black submission during this time of “intensified prejudice,” Du Bois wrote, Washington was encouraging white repression: “In the history of nearly all other

⁷¹ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Owl Books, 1993), 277; James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way*, 203.

⁷² W.E.B. Du Bois, “Of Spiritual Strivings,” in *The Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903; Rockville, Md.: ArcManor, 2008), 11-13.

racess and peoples, the doctrine preached at such crises has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses, and that a people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing.”⁷³

Washington’s increasingly bitter and sarcastic dismissal of liberal arts education infuriated Du Bois. Washington maintained that blacks should be educated in industrial schools that taught practical skills, not colleges and universities offering Latin and literature. Du Bois seethed as Washington made jokes about the overeducated Negro who enjoyed opera but couldn’t work a plow. For Du Bois, Lewis wrote, “higher education was not merely a passport to social and professional standing but the master key to collective empowerment as well.” Du Bois understood the power of economic advancement in the daily lives of black Americans. Yet when Washington claimed that “higher degrees were a cover for distinguished indolence,” Du Bois accused the Tuskegee principal of doing grave damage to the future of his race.⁷⁴

Du Bois argued that Washington’s political acquiescence and disdain for liberal arts education would set back African American progress and lock in white supremacy rule for decades to come. Washington’s doctrine, Du Bois wrote, allowed whites in the North and South to “shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro’s shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators.”⁷⁵ Two years later, in 1905, he helped found the Niagara Movement, a group of black professionals determined to

⁷³ Du Bois, “Of Booker T. Washington and Others,” in *The Souls of Black Folks*, 41.

⁷⁴ David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: Owl Books, 1993), 261-262.

⁷⁵ Du Bois, “Of Booker T. Washington and Others,” in *The Souls of Black Folks*, 46.

counter Washington's influence. By the end of the decade, the Niagara Movement had joined forces with white progressives in the North to form the bi-racial NAACP.

Founded during a series of meetings in 1909 and 1910, the NAACP sought to rally support for the equal treatment of all races under the law. Through the creation of local branches supported by dues-paying members, the NAACP would eventually develop a grassroots movement that was strong enough to challenge the nation's system of legal discrimination.⁷⁶ Yet as sociologist Jeffrey Alexander contends, the NAACP's greatest successes during its early years were "primarily communicative."⁷⁷ Though white progressives dominated the founding executive committee, it was Du Bois who served as the voice of the new civil rights organization. Through the pages of *The Crisis*, the group's monthly magazine, Du Bois established the interpretive lens through which the NAACP would report on public events. He emphasized the contradictions at the heart of the American democratic experiment, with legalized discrimination existing in a nation that proclaimed its commitment to equality and justice for all people. Du Bois defined black efforts to overcome this discrimination as a necessary and patriotic act of citizenship that would restore the country's damaged civic ideal. In launching the magazine's editorial section, he promised the NAACP would try to protect "the rights of men, irrespective of color or race, for the highest ideals of American democracy." In his first editorial, Du Bois declared the NAACP's intent to highlight and explore "those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 17-19.

⁷⁷ Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 288.

⁷⁸ "W.E.B. Du Bois, "Editorial," *The Crisis*, 1, November 1910; see also: Lewis, *W.E.B Du Bois: Biography of a Race*, 410-411.

The Crisis and the NAACP's communicative efforts played a significant role in helping to create what Alexander calls a black counterpublic during the early twentieth century. Although nominally citizens, blacks occupied a subordinate position in American society. Dominated by whites, they lived under Jim Crow oppression in the South, and they were rarely allowed to climb beyond the lowest economic rungs in the North. They were mostly ignored in the nation's newspapers and magazines. African Americans were members of an out-group that existed on the fringes of civic life. Yet Alexander maintains that domination that can spread the seeds of civic reform. Out-groups that are denied access to the civil and noncivil spheres around them end up creating a counterpublic of their own. In doing so, they mirror the civil sphere of the dominant society, which allows them to communicate internally and gather resources that can later be used to engage the surrounding civil sphere.

Since the first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, was published in 1827, African Americans had sought to speak for themselves. Yet with more than 90 percent of their intended audience living in the South, northern black newspapers and pamphlets had struggled to find black readers. It was not until the beginning of the great migration that a robust black counterpublic could develop. Since the Civil War, the industrial revolution had been luring workers from the fields to the cities, creating the giant urban centers of the North. Yet blacks had been mostly excluded from these northern factory jobs. In 1914, the start of World War I halted European immigration to the United States, creating a shortage of industrial workers in the North. Suddenly in demand, southern blacks flocked to industrial boomtowns such as Detroit, Chicago, Pittsburgh, and New York.

Abandoning the wide expanses of the rural South, they now lived in close quarters in teeming urban neighborhoods.

Their arrival came at a time when newspapers and magazines were flourishing throughout the country. The industrial growth that had created the great cities of the North had increased the demand for advertising and generated a booming media industry. By 1920, the United States had surpassed Europe in the number of periodicals published.⁷⁹ Under these promising circumstances, the black press emerged more fully in the North, with Robert Abbott's weekly *Chicago Defender* leading the way. Started on a shoestring budget in 1905, the *Defender* grew and prospered across the following decade. But like the rest of the black press, it did so in the shadow of the white society.⁸⁰ Mostly ignored by white readers, black newspapers and magazines carried their interpretations of public events to the growing black counterpublic in the North. By repeatedly highlighting discrimination and demanding justice, Alexander argues, the black press helped crystalize black public opinion in the North and create a robust and vital counterpublic capable of asserting its democratic rights in the nation's civil sphere. With his sharp eye and fluid writing skills, Du Bois turned *The Crisis* into an influential source of analysis within the new black counterpublic. Closely read by black editors as well as black grassroots activists, *The Crisis* served as a leading voice for black inclusion in the American civil sphere.

⁷⁹ Gerald J. Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Richard L. Kaplan, "From Partisanship to Professionalism: The Transformation of the Daily Press," in *A History of the Book in America: Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, eds., Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 116-139.

⁸⁰ Washburn, *The African American Newspaper*, 73-112.

The success of the black counterpublic came in two distinct steps. Initially, it helped African Americans in the North perceive of themselves as part of a community that was capable of fighting for its interests. In the 1920s, the cultural movement that came to known as the Harlem Renaissance helped facilitate this transition. During this period, the African American press heralded the rise of the New Negro. No longer shuffling and submissive, the New Negro had shed the cultural chains of his slave history and looked to the future with a sense of hope and possibility. A cultural outpouring of novels, poetry, music, and art challenged the white culture's notions of beauty and celebrated aspects of black life that had been vilified by the dominant society. In doing so, Harlem Renaissance artists and activists won allies among white intellectuals who were attracted to their fresh interpretations of art, culture, and society.⁸¹ This new alliance with white cultural leaders allowed black intellectuals to disseminate their interpretation of events into a small but influential corner of the white civil sphere.

The black counterpublic exerted its greatest power once it had grown large enough to warrant attention from the larger white society. Although such attention would inevitably prompt a backlash from white authorities, it allowed the black press to project its interpretation of civic life back into the larger white society. By highlighting the discriminatory acts that violated the nation's democratic ideal, the black counterpublic managed to elicit empathy from liberal whites who believed in the those ideas. (will add examples) Such empathy persuaded some of these influential whites that the fight to

⁸¹ Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); David Levering Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 1989; Jeffrey B. Ferguson, "Introduction," in *The Harlem Renaissance: A Brief History With Documents* (Boston, Ma.: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008).

overcome racial discrimination was essential to the preservation of American democracy. Liberal whites began to realize that the fight over civil rights was their fight too. As Alexander contends, the rise of a counterpublic that could reflect the larger values of the dominant society and win allies was an essential step in the process of building a successful civil rights movement.

The rise of a black counterpublic in the North would play a significant role in the creation of a civil rights movement in South Carolina, but the process would be slow and arduous, with several false starts along the way. Du Bois' skill as a powerful essayist would help the fledgling NAACP spread into the South during the years before the US entry into World War I. By 1915, *The Crisis* had made its way into the hands of attorney Butler W. Nance, a leading black activist in Columbia, South Carolina. Nance and a handful of black community leaders had established the Capital Civic League, an organization devoted to the fight for African-American rights in South Carolina. Describing himself as a "long-time subscriber" to *The Crisis*, Nance wrote Du Bois a letter in June 1915 expressing his interests in having the Capital Civic League become a branch of the NAACP. "There are several things that could be done," Nance wrote, "if you would not be afraid to operate in the South."⁸²

The NAACP's move into the Deep South during World War I was a turning point for the African American freedom struggle. By the end of 1916, more than a quarter million African Americans had left the South for jobs in the North. Yet as James Weldon Johnson noted at the time, the great migration created new possibilities for those who

⁸² Butler W. Nance to W.E.B. Du Bois, June 15, 1915, Columbia Branch File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers.

stayed behind.⁸³ For the first time in decades, whites in the South were forced to acknowledge the value of the black work force. And as Johnson argued in a 1917 speech at the St. Paul's Christian Methodist Episcopal church in Savannah, Georgia, the cracks in the status quo created by the wartime disruption offered "the Negro race the change to register its first protest against its treatment in the South."⁸⁴

Johnson's emergence as the NAACP's new field director in December 1916 signaled a new effort to organize in the Deep South. Across the first six months of 1917, Johnson traveled from Richmond, Virginia, to Tampa, Florida, and organized more than a dozen local branches. The organization's so-called "Southern Empire" gave the civil rights group what Du Bois called "a real first line of defense facing the enemy at proper range."⁸⁵ Black South Carolinians joined in this surge of activism. In Columbia, lawyer and publisher Nathaniel J. Frederick and activists Rebecca Hull Walton and Rachel Hull Montieth joined Nance to press local authorities to expand black voting rights. A longtime Republican, Frederick published the *Southern Indicator* in the 1910s and later launched the *Palmetto Leader*. Both papers encouraged blacks to seek the right to vote and waged campaigns to halt lynching, yet they treaded carefully to avoid a white backlash. In Charleston, the new NAACP branch fought a successful campaign to demand the hiring of black teachers at the Avery Institute, the city's high school for black students. When John McCray was valedictorian of Avery in the late 1920s, he studied under black educators such as Pearly Simmons, a man who helped fuel McCray's

⁸³ Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, 61.

⁸⁴ *Savannah Tribune*, March 10, 1917, I-G-46. NAACP Papers.

⁸⁵ W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Heart of the South," *The Crisis*, May 1917, 18.

political aspirations.⁸⁶ If he had attended Avery ten years earlier, McCray would have been taught by white teachers only.

Four years after Nance had written to the editor of *The Crisis* and asked to join the NAACP, the civil rights organization had formed active branches in every corner of South Carolina, from Charleston on the coast to the capital city of Columbia and the nearby Black Belt farming town of Orangeburg in the Midlands, up through the Piedmont cities of Greenville and Spartanburg and across the tobacco-growing rural areas along the Pee Dee River in the northeastern corner. Nance had written the letter that helped launch this surge in black civil rights work in June 1915, the same year that Booker T. Washington died. Historians have been tempted to overstate the importance of this coincidence. Washington's death, one noted, "marked the symbolic passing of his accommodationist philosophy."⁸⁷ Yet this implies that the accommodationist strategy died along with its most famous proponent, a fact not borne out by South Carolina history. This view of the African American freedom struggle suggests the need to appease whites was a choice made solely black Carolinians, not a demand imposed on them by a stronger foe. The culture of accommodation that McCray and his allies would fight so valiantly in the 1940s persisted because of the very real threat of white violence and oppression, not because of any commitment to a political or philosophical theory. As Du Bois had noted earlier in the century, "Whenever we submit to humiliation and

⁸⁶ John McCray, "The Way It Was," *Charleston Chronicle*, Dec. 26, 1981.

⁸⁷ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 20.

oppression it is because of superior brute force; and even when bending to the inevitable we bend with unabated protest.”⁸⁸

During the early years of World War I, Nance and his colleagues had battled that culture of accommodation, with mixed results. In his letter to Du Bois, Nance had included a copy of the Capital Civic League’s latest “Address to the People of South Carolina.” The statement called for the creation of an “organized movement” to fight for African American equality, and it criticized “the weak-kneed ministers who claim the church is no place to talk civil rights.”⁸⁹ This was clearly a shot at the best-known black leader in South Carolina, Rev. Richard Carroll of Columbia, a protégé of Washington’s who had pursued the accommodationist strategy in the state. Carroll urged black Carolinians to forego politics and accept their inferior status in society. “The negro will never be a ruling or dominant race,” Carroll told the *Charleston News and Courier* in 1905. “The people who think will always rule, (not) the people who sing, as do the negroes.” Of Tillman and the white supremacists who had taken control of the state in the 1890s, Carroll said: “Their patience has been great. Their tolerance has been marvelous. We have made many friends among them, and what we need to do is strive to make their friendship stronger and more abiding.” To accomplish this, Carroll said African Americans should “focus on their own short-comings instead of advising whites about theirs.” Carroll preached a message of racial uplift, but one that emphasized white superiority in the strict hierarchy of southern society. “The white man must stay in his place,” Carroll said. “When he uplifts himself, he will be followed by the negro at a

⁸⁸ W.E.B Du Bois, “The Parting of the Ways,” *World Today*, April 1904, 521-523.

⁸⁹ An Address of the People of South Carolina, Capital Civic League, 1915, Columbia Branch File, I-G-196, NAACP Papers.

respectful distance, but when he lowers himself to the plane of the negro, then the negro will get out of his place and trouble will be brewed.”⁹⁰

Like Washington, Carroll’s soothing message of appeasement attracted strong support from white leaders, particularly from the Gonzalez brothers, founders of *The State* newspaper in Columbia. Created for the specific political purpose of opposing Tillman and his allies in South Carolina, *The State* advocated a type of white supremacy associated with the state’s planter-class elites. Like Carroll, the newspaper placed a great emphasis on hierarchy and the “place” of whites and blacks in southern society. The newspaper supported black aspirations for uplift, as long as they did not interfere with white rule or create racial turmoil. Editor William E. Gonzales embraced Carroll and backed him financially and editorially well into the 1920s. Carroll held an annual conference on race relations in South Carolina where Gonzales and other white leaders often spoke, although Tillman never accepted his many invitations to appear at the event. In March of 1909, Booker T. Washington toured South Carolina, with Carroll among the black dignitaries at his side. Washington visited twelve cities and made several whistle stop speeches in between to spread his vision of both racial uplift and peaceful co-existence with white supremacy. *The State* wrote glowingly of Washington’s tour and encouraged whites to go hear him speak.⁹¹ For white South Carolinians, Carroll and his followers represented the best of the black community, and as the nation prepared to enter World War I, they accepted the servile tone of Carroll’s public pronouncements as widespread black acceptance of the racial status quo in this state.

⁹⁰ Carroll quoted in Newby, *Black Carolinians*, 16, 174-176.

⁹¹ For a full treatment of Washington’s 1909 tour of South Carolina, see: David H. Jackson, Jr., “Booker T. Washington in South Carolina, March 1909,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 113, 3, July 2012, 192-220.

Yet Carroll, the state's most famous accommodator, would also come to symbolize black ambivalence toward the strategy. Much like McCray in the late 1930s, Carroll would surprise his white supporters and his black critics with a sudden shift in strategy during the war. His earlier obsequiousness had approached the level of parody, but Carroll had been biding his time looking for an opening to push for black rights. He believed the war and the increase in black migration from the state had created that opening. It was time for black Carolinians to "to come into their own," Carroll argued. He used his access to *The State* newspaper to press publicly for better schools, better wages, and better protection under the law. Lawmakers meet "year after year to make laws for the uplift and salvation of white people" while ignoring the needs of blacks, Carroll wrote in the newspaper. He also demanded that whites stop vilifying African Americans and engineering racial conflicts to rally voters each election cycle – a criticism aimed at Cole Blease, the former governor and frequent political candidate who often defended lynching as a means of controlling the black race.⁹²

With Carroll's Baptist ministry now on board, the black civil rights struggle gained momentum during the war years. In Columbia, Nance and his colleagues joined the national NAACP in denouncing D.W. Griffith's notorious film, *The Birth of a Nation*. Based on Thomas Dixon's novel, *The Clansman*, Griffith's film depicted Reconstruction as a period of corruption, plunder and chaos fueled by black lawlessness. Griffith's spectacular production used the new medium of motion pictures to further the white supremacist propaganda campaign against black citizenship. As a powerful communicative institution, the growing feature film industry would play a significant role

⁹² Bryant Simon, "The Appeal of Cole Blease of South Carolina: Race, Class, and Sex in the New South," *Journal of Southern History*, 62, 1 (Feb., 1996), 57-86.

in delivering interpretations and influencing public opinion across the twentieth century. Thus the fight over *Birth of a Nation* was an important confrontation in the long battle for African American inclusion within the nation's civil sphere. The film fed popular stereotypes of blacks as both child-like buffoons and violent sexual predators. And by portraying black lawmakers as the pawns of nefarious white carpetbaggers, Griffith's movie furthered the southern white argument that blacks were intellectually incapable of participating in civic life. In South Carolina, the new NAACP chapter organized protests against a screening of *The Birth of a Nation* in Columbia, arguing that the movie promoted "racial antagonism" at a time when brave African American soldiers were "giving their all for worldwide democracy."⁹³

The campaign against *The Birth of a Nation* was part of a surge in black political activism during the war. Another Columbia black civic group, the Lincoln Memorial Association, urged lawmakers to prosecute lynching and appoint African American superintendents to manage black school districts. And in Charleston, the NAACP protested the Navy's effort to fill jobs at an on-base clothing factory with "white women only." As a result, the Navy eventually hired 250 black women.⁹⁴ Black Charlestonians also launched their successful effort to replace white teachers with blacks at Avery Institute, the city's lone African-American high school. As the war came to an end, and as black soldiers returned to the state, leaders planned to step up the fight for equality. In a ceremony at Benedict College in Columbia, local physician S.F. Haygood said black

⁹³ *The State*, March 14, 1918.

⁹⁴ Theodore Hemingway, "Prelude to Change: Black Carolinians in the War Years, 1914-1920," *Journal of Negro History*, 65, 3 (Summer 1980), 212-227, 220.

soldiers had fought bravely and valiantly for democracy abroad, and now, “We want democracy at home.”⁹⁵

The spreading black activism shocked a white supremacist leadership more used to the timid ways of the accommodationists. A rising young politician named James F. Byrnes had taken note of Du Bois’ essays in *The Crisis*. Born to a poor Catholic family in Charleston, Byrnes had scrambled up by his bootstraps to earn a law degree and become a protégé of South Carolina’s dominant politician, “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman. In 1919, Byrnes represented South Carolina’s second district in Congress. Later, he would serve in the Senate, on the Supreme Court, and as Truman’s secretary of state, and he would be seen as a more moderate Southern voice during the civil rights struggle to come. On an August day in 1919, however, he took the floor of the US Congress and delivered what his biographer has called “one of the most inflammatory speeches on race ever read into the *Congressional Record*.”⁹⁶ It was near the end of a hot summer of racial violence in small towns and large cities across the nation. In Charleston, white sailors stationed at the nearby Navy Yard brawled with some black youths. The sailors eventually returned with guns. Two African Americans were killed and seventeen people of both races were injured. Byrnes claimed the black press, led by De Bois’ *Crisis*, had radicalized black veterans returning from the war and helped incite the spreading violence. He demanded that the editor be charged with treason. “If ... charging the government with lynching, disfranchising its citizens, encouraging ignorance, and stealing from its citizens, does not constitute a violation of the espionage act,” Byrnes said, “it is difficult to conceive

⁹⁵ *The State*, Feb. 21, 1919.

⁹⁶ David Robertson, *Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes* (New York: Norton, 1994), 85-86.

language sufficiently abusive to constitute a violation.” The congressman concluded with a stark warning for black Americans: if they did not like post-war America, they were welcome to leave. In fact, he vowed to support forced deportations of racial leaders.⁹⁷

Byrnes’ strong words on the House floor were part of a national effort to taint civil rights work with the Red Scare of rising Communism in 1919. He made the connection explicit, accusing Du Bois and the rest of the black press of instigating violence in an attempt to create a “little Russia” in the South. Black leaders in South Carolina countered Byrnes’ version of events with compelling stories of the bravery and heroism exhibited by African Americans who fought for freedom and democracy in Europe. To win this battle of narratives, however, African Americans needed the help of allies within the nation’s larger mainstream culture. They needed the support of empathetic opinion leaders who could help spread their message and sway public opinion. Without such access, black voices were overwhelmed by the arguments put forward by their enemies. White supremacists in South Carolina were once again free to crush the African American movement without fear of northern intervention. They could use the threat of overwhelming violence and economic retribution to deter black political organization and, most importantly, prevent its spread from the small core of NAACP activists in the cities to the larger African American population in the countryside.

It was a tactic the white leadership had used before. Two decades earlier, white Democrats led by Tillman had used violence to suppress black political aspirations and impose Jim Crow rule. In 1898, when a prominent white Republican, Robert “Red”

⁹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 66th Congress, 1st Session, 4302-B; see also, Robertson, *Sly and Able*,” 85-86.

Tolbert, attempted to register black voters in Greenwood County to support his congressional run, angry whites responded with a campaign of terror. Dozens of blacks were slaughtered, and hundreds more fled the county. The state's governor, William Ellerbe, refused to prosecute those who carried out the violence, and in Washington the McKinley administration rejected Tolbert's request for federal intervention.⁹⁸

Historians note that the so-called Phoenix massacre – named after the small community where the violence began – had both racial and economic motivations. Triggered by the effort to register black voters, the white anger also had roots in labor competition between white and black sharecroppers in Greenwood County. The massacre not only denied blacks the vote but also forced many off the land, allowing white farmers to rent farm land at a lower rate in the county. The Phoenix slaughter also established a precedent that would hold firm across the first three decades of Jim Crow rule. Black Carolinians understood that neither state nor national authorities would step in to protect them from extralegal violence. It is no surprise, then, that the black community in the state adopted the strategy of accommodation. Rural blacks, who comprised the overwhelming majority of the state's African American population, remained dependent on white landowners for their livelihood.

The threat of lynching remained constant for black South Carolinians across the 1920s. The estimates vary, but studies suggest as many as 14 African Americans were

⁹⁸ H. Leon Prather, Sr. "The Origins of the Phoenix Racial Massacre of 1898," in *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society*, eds. Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler, Jr.

killed by white mobs between 1919 and 1927.⁹⁹ Five of those murders are believed to have occurred in 1921, when white Democrats were eager to halt the civil rights activism that had emerged during the war. White politicians such as former governor and US Senator Cole Blease signaled their support for the use of mob violence to control the black population during the first three decades of Jim Crow rule. While serving as governor, Blease urged white men in South Carolina to guard against “the black ape and baboon” who lurks in the dark waiting for the chance to rape a white woman. Lynch mobs were necessary, Blease argued. Rather than violate the law, they helped maintain it in South Carolina. “Whenever the constitution of my state steps between me and the defense of the virtue of a white woman, then I say to hell with the constitution!” Blease told the national governor’s conference in 1912. After receiving reports of some lynchings, Blease would celebrate publicly with what northern newspapers called a “bizarre death dance.”¹⁰⁰

The black press in the North demanded authorities take action against the South Carolina governor. But the northern white press did little more than note the outrageousness of Blease’s actions, and the federal government showed no interest in intervening.¹⁰¹ Without the prospect of northern support, African Americans who remained in South Carolina had two choices: leave the state, which many did, or find ways to accommodate white supremacy and learn to live with the racial status quo.

⁹⁹ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 57-58.

¹⁰⁰ Blease quotes come from Coleman Livingston Blease Papers, as cited in Simon, “The Appeal of Cole Blease in South Carolina.”; see also, I.A. Newby, *Jim Crow’s Defense: Anti-Negro Thought in America, 1900-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965).

¹⁰¹ See, for example, clips from the *New York Times*, August 27, 1915, and the *Los Angeles Sunday Times*, January 1, 1913, among other newspapers cited in Simon, “The Appeal of Cole Blease in South Carolina.”

In the early 1920s, the fledgling black civil rights movement in South Carolina had not been strong enough to withstand the white counterattack. And the black northern counterpublic, while steadily growing, had been unable to rally widespread opposition to the uncivil acts of Cole Blease and James Byrnes. Free to act without fear of northern pressure, Byrnes helped delegitimize black activists as communists and un-American, and Blease appeared to sanction mob violence and economic retribution. With most black South Carolinians living in rural areas and working as sharecroppers, white landowners exerted near total control over their economic lives. The Depression arrived early in rural South Carolina when a global decline in cotton prices and the spread of the Boll Weevil combined to destroy the farm economy. Many white farmers gave up and took jobs in textile mills and other factories near the cities. Denied those options, black farmers struggled to feed their families while living under the ever-present threat of white retribution.

In 1935, when John McCray graduated from college, the surge in black activism that marked the early 1920s had long passed. He returned to his home state to find a desolate political landscape. The black demand for equality that had gained traction during World War I had been replaced by the familiar call for accommodation and racial uplift. The NAACP existed as “little more than a paper organization,” with branches in Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville, but none in the rural counties where most African Americans lived.¹⁰² After touring the state, one national NAACP official reported that South Carolina’s black community was listless and disengaged: “The traditional organizations of the Negro community, their churches, colleges, civic welfare leagues ...

¹⁰² Hemmingway, “Under the Yoke of Bondage,” 391; Hoffman, “The Genesis,” 354.

were generally quiescent.”¹⁰³ The one newspaper that had tried to maintain the push for civil rights, the *Palmetto Leader* a Republican Party newspaper published by attorney Nathaniel Frederick, had begun to soften its political coverage in the early 1930s in hopes of holding onto at least some white advertising. With Frederick’s death in 1938, the paper abandoned politics all together.¹⁰⁴

Beneath that stark political surface, however, there were rumblings of change. The Depression and Roosevelt’s New Deal policies had shifted the political landscape ever so slightly, creating an opening for the black counterpublic to exert influence in electoral politics. Abandoned by the Republican Party during the 1920s, black voters in the North embraced Roosevelt and his New Deal. In the 1934 mid-term elections, the Democratic Party openly campaigned for African American voters in key northern states, and in 1936, African American voters across the nation helped sweep Roosevelt to re-election.¹⁰⁵ The black counterpublic’s communicative strength had begun to attract more white support in the North. And the emergence of the black vote within the Democratic coalition empowered white liberals who were eager to confront the party’s southern segregationist wing on the issue of civil rights. With his wife, Eleanor, taking the lead, Roosevelt took timid steps to reach out to the African American community. When Roosevelt openly condemned mob rule and “lynch law” in a national radio address in 1934, he angered his southern white Democratic allies, but his comments, mild as they

¹⁰³ Hoffman, “The Genesis,” 354.

¹⁰⁴ See: Theodore Hemmingway. “Black Press in South Carolina,” from *The Black Press in the South, 1865-1979*, ed., Henry Louis Suggs (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), 163-181.

¹⁰⁵ Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 47.

were, sent a signal of support to liberals in the North and, most importantly, to black activists in the South.

In South Carolina, a tiny vanguard of civil rights activists received the message. The moribund NAACP network in the state slowly flickered back to life. Prodded by a plumber's aide from the tiny village of Cheraw, the state's branches voted to form a state conference of branches to coordinate activities statewide.¹⁰⁶ In the state capital, Modjeska Monteith Simkins joined forces with the Reverend James Hinton to rouse a sleepy political organization. They launched a furious battle to force the Works Progress Administration and other New Deal agencies to employ more black Carolinians.¹⁰⁷

When McCray began publishing his first newspaper, South Carolina's black community was at a turning point. The spirit of protest had re-emerged, yet it still had to compete with a powerful culture of accommodation that dominated black political thought in the state. For the movement to expand to the countryside and rally support among a majority of African Americans in the state, the NAACP needed to persuade the mass of black South Carolinians of the efficacy of protest. Otherwise, the emerging activism of the late 1930s would fade in the same way as its predecessor had in the year after World War I. To avoid that fate, NAACP leaders in the state realized the need to build a broad-based opposition movement that united the African American community.

With the help of McCray's newspaper, they would build a robust counterpublic in the South. Denied access to the mainstream white society in South Carolina, African

¹⁰⁶ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 108-116; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 142.

¹⁰⁷ Hoffman, "The Genesis," 355.

Americans would turn inward to confront the debate over accommodation and eventually embrace a culture of protest that demanded the full rights of citizenship. By standing up to white oppression, a vibrant and united black counterpublic in South Carolina would embrace and publicly appeal to the ideals of liberty and justice that undergird American democracy. To unite the community, however, the NAACP needed a communications tool – and McCray’s newspaper would step up to play that critical role in the fight.

While McCray never explained his shift from tactical accommodation to full protest, his later columns and oral history interviews suggest the arrival of Osceola E. McKaine played a significant role in the transformation. A charismatic World War I veteran from Sumter, South Carolina, McKaine had organized black soldiers to oppose racism in the military while serving in France and Belgium.¹⁰⁸ After the war, he spent two years in Harlem editing a political magazine and trying to launch a civil rights organization. Frustrated by what he saw as a lack of black militancy, McKaine returned to Belgium in 1922 and spent the next two decades managing a successful nightclub. Far from his childhood home in the Jim Crow South, McKaine enjoyed the racial liberalism of the European continent. Belgians treated him as a respected businessman, and his staff included numerous white employees. In 1940, however, World War II reached the Low Countries. McKaine fled Belgium just ahead of Hitler’s invading armies and returned home to Sumter.¹⁰⁹

Depressed by what he found in his native South Carolina, McKaine resumed the civil rights work he had abandoned in 1922. He revived the town’s NAACP branch and

¹⁰⁸ Richards, “Osceola E. McKaine and the Struggle for Black Civil Rights.”

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 90-94; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 196-197.

worked to organize a statewide campaign around the issue of black teacher pay. Under the doctrine of “separate but equal,” black teachers should have received the same salaries as their white counterparts. The NAACP had made the issue a priority in the late 1930s and had won concessions from other Deep South states. As usual, South Carolina was a holdout.¹¹⁰ In 1940, white teachers in South Carolina averaged \$939 in annual salary; black teachers made less than half of that at \$388 a year.¹¹¹ Angered by those numbers, McKaine struggled to organize support to challenge the inequity in court. The effort brought him to Columbia, South Carolina’s capital city, where he developed a close relationship with Modjeska Monteith Simkins, the NAACP activist. Simkins had grown up in a prominent black family in Columbia. Her mother had helped establish the city’s first NAACP chapter in 1917.¹¹² She married Andrew Simkins, a successful businessman and banker who served the black community. By 1940, Modjeska Simkins could devote herself to NAACP protest work without immediate fear of financial retribution. In McKaine, she found the perfect ally. Simkins later described a discussion the two had on the back porch of her Columbia home. Over a cool drink, the two activists made a pact: They would challenge the forces of white supremacy directly in South Carolina and they vowed to “destroy” anyone in the black community who tried to stop them.¹¹³

To overcome the culture of accommodation in South Carolina’s black community, McKaine and Simkins believed the NAACP needed what they called “a

¹¹⁰ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 197.

¹¹¹ Newby, *Black Carolinians*, ” 141.

¹¹² Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 145.

¹¹³ Aba-Mecha, “Black Woman Activist in Twentieth Century South Carolina: Modjeska Monteith Simkins,” 44.

fighting organ” – a newspaper that was committed to the cause. They wanted a newspaper that would work directly with the NAACP and fully embrace black protest.¹¹⁴ The two hatched a plan to have McCray merge his *Charleston Lighthouse* with the smaller *Sumter Informer* and move the new operation to the state’s capital city. McCray had grown to respect McKaine’s hard-charging style – “fiercely a race man,” he called him – and the young editor agreed to the merger.¹¹⁵ By late 1941, the new *Lighthouse and Informer* was operating on Washington Street, in the heart of Columbia’s black business district.¹¹⁶ It would become the leading weapon in the NAACP’s effort to reshape black politics in South Carolina. They would use it to create a united black counterpublic capable of launching a direct assault on the forces of white supremacy in the state.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 51.

¹¹⁵ John H. McCray, “The Way It Was,” *Charleston Chronicle*, March 5, 1982.

¹¹⁶ John McCray oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, February 18, 1985. Transcripts in author’s possession.

CHAPTER 3

BEATING DOWN THE FEAR

John McCray called them the “I Killits.” These were members of the black community who McCray and his allies believed were working with white supremacists to try to “kill” the civil rights struggle. “The ‘I Killits’ are low-down skunks,” McCray wrote in “The Need for Changing,” his weekly column in the *Lighthouse and Informer*.¹¹⁷ In McCray’s view, these “vultures” undermined black civil rights efforts in return for a few scraps from the white man’s table. “They try to line up on the side of the already well-capable whites, and where possible, hand to these whites ammunition with which to blast away at us,” he wrote. An “I Killit” believed “the white man will win, and if he is at his side some mercy will come to him, and he’ll have a little niche a bit higher than the rest of his people.”

McCray was writing in August 1948. Black South Carolinians were preparing to vote in a Democratic Party primary – the only primary that mattered in South Carolina – for the first time since the 1870s. At the same time, the state’s young governor, J. Strom Thurmond, was running for president as a leader of the “Dixiecrats,” a group of white southern Democrats who bolted the national party over its support for black civil rights. As editor of the *Lighthouse and Informer*, the state’s leading black newspaper, McCray

¹¹⁷ John H. McCray, “The I Killits,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*,” August 22, 1948, 4.

had helped lead the fight to overturn the whites-only primary in South Carolina.¹¹⁸ He routinely excoriated Thurmond and other white supremacist leaders in his weekly column. But they weren't the source of his anger this time. Instead, McCray focused his rage on members of his own race. In his column, McCray compared the "I Killits" to another group within the black community: the "I Dumnits":

The 'I Dumnits' mean well at heart. They are just weakling fatalists who tremble at the mere suggestion of battling for our rights. They tell you about 'trouble' if you think about fighting for what you believe and if this should fail, they run into a hole and hide while the battle rages. But as soon as the victory parade forms, they dash out and fight like the devil to take over the whole business and acclaim the credit.¹¹⁹

The man who drew McCray's wrath and triggered the "I Killit" column was another black editor, a lifelong nemesis of McCray's named Davis Lee. Lee was a conservative who did battle with the civil rights movement in the South throughout his career.¹²⁰ He had edited the *Savannah Journal* in Georgia in the late 1930s, then moved north to take over the *Newark Telegraph*.¹²¹ In the summer of 1948, Lee accused black

¹¹⁸ Lau, *Democracy Rising*; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*; Jack I. Hayes, *South Carolina and the New Deal* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Sullivan, *Days of Hope*; Hoffman, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Civil Rights in South Carolina"; Roefs, "Leading the Civil Rights Vanguard in South Carolina."

¹¹⁹ McCray, *Lighthouse and Informer*, August 22, 1948, 4.

¹²⁰ Hemmingway. "Black Press in South Carolina."

¹²¹ Lee later returned to South Carolina and edited the *Orangeburg Herald* in the 1950s and 60s.

civil rights activists of ruining the business climate in the South. He claimed black and white southerners had gotten along well before outside agitators began stirring up trouble. When Thurmond hailed Lee as the true voice of black southerners, McCray's *Lighthouse and Informer* fired back: "If Governor Thurmond and the Dixiecrats wish to impress southern Negroes with the thinking of Negroes they would do well to quote some other person, one for whom there is respect and esteem among Negroes. Lee has neither."¹²²

McCray's attack on Davis Lee and his broadside against the "I Killits" and the "I Dumnits" were not anomalies. The *Lighthouse and Informer* conducted an ongoing assault on conservative forces within the black community – not just outliers like Davis Lee, but more respected black leaders as well. Led by McCray and his chief colleagues, Osceola E. McKaine and Modjeska Monteith Simkins, the newspaper demanded black assertiveness and ridiculed accommodation, opportunism, and apathy. It highlighted the injustices of a Jim Crow South that privileged whiteness but saved its greatest outrage for black South Carolinians who refused to fight back. With their editorial stance, McCray and his colleagues joined the debate that had animated the black community since the rise of white supremacy and Jim Crow. In the ongoing struggle between accommodation and protest, McCray and his NAACP colleagues used their newspaper to rally support for direct confrontation and undermine the argument for cautious negotiation.

The black civil rights movement flourished in 1940s South Carolina. The *Lighthouse and Informer* worked hand-in-hand with the NAACP, and by 1944 the newspaper had become the movement's "unofficial propaganda engine and McCray its

¹²² "They Should Have Asked," *Lighthouse and Informer*, August 22, 1948, 4.

chief propagandist.”¹²³ During the decade the NAACP’s membership grew dramatically and the civil rights organization won two critical court cases in the state: a battle over equal pay for black teachers, followed by the abolition of the state’s all-white Democratic Party primary. The organization also helped launch *Briggs v. Elliott*, the Clarendon County, South Carolina, case that was eventually wrapped into *Brown v. Board of Education*, the landmark Supreme Court ruling outlawing school segregation.¹²⁴

Before they could launch such a campaign, NAACP activists had to persuade a wary African American public that the time was right to confront white supremacy directly. McCray referred to this effort as “beating down the fear” in the black community.¹²⁵ Yet the newspaper’s push for a campaign of protest was not uncontested. Conservative black leaders in the state believed confrontation would trigger a violent backlash, and they had historical evidence to support their view.¹²⁶ McCray and his allies had to overcome this culture of accommodation before they could unite the community behind a strategy of confrontation with white supremacy in South Carolina. As the Davis Lee incident showed, white southerners were eager to make use of the divisions within the African American community to bolster their claims that the Jim Crow system benefited both races in the South – that social segregation and the elimination of most blacks from politics was a necessary act that strengthened rather than undermined American democracy.

¹²³ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 136.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 196-206.

¹²⁵ McCray to Thurgood Marshall, November 9, 1944, II-B, 209, NAACP Papers.

¹²⁶ For some examples see Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) and *Dark Journey: Black Mississippians in the Age of Jim Crow* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

In South Carolina, McCray and his NAACP allies established the tools necessary to communicate a message of resistance throughout the African American community. The activists understood the need for a powerful newspaper – what they called a “fighting organ” – to spread their interpretation of how black Carolinians should define themselves in the face of white oppression.¹²⁷ They wanted blacks to perceive themselves as worthy of full citizenship and capable of demanding it. To achieve that, they needed to overcome the persistent calls for accommodation and acquiescence. McCray and the NAACP wanted their community to embrace a collective narrative that depicted African Americans in South Carolina as courageous fighters for freedom willing to stand up to a more powerful foe. Through this collective narrative, they would create a black counterpublic that could arouse the dormant ideals of the democratic nation and win critical allies within the larger public.

It is this power to interpret events and use those interpretations to gain empathy and support that is central to Jeffrey Alexander’s theory of democratic life. Narratives have the power to shape public opinion, and public opinion can, occasionally, lead to social change. In this sense, Alexander’s theory of the civil sphere follows the constructivist model that has dominated media effects and mass communications research since the late 1970s. How a communicator “frames” an event can shape the way the public makes meaning of it. In this way, print culture and other communicative

¹²⁷ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 123-135; Bedingfield, “John H. McCray and the Framing of the Civil Rights Struggle in South Carolina,” 91-101.

institutions help produce what Berger and Luckmann called “the social construction of reality.”¹²⁸

This study of McCray’s newspaper and its effort to create a vibrant black counterpublic in early 1940s South Carolina breaks new ground in communication research by linking Alexander’s theory of the civil sphere to the concept of frame analysis. Alexander’s theory emphasizes the role of communicative institutions, particularly the mass media, in shaping public opinion and influencing decision-making within the civil sphere. Frame analysis allows us to examine this meaning-making process in more specific detail. The link between civil sphere theory and framing is embedded in the notion of a socially constructed reality in which political actors compete to persuade citizens to embrace their particularly interpretive framework. By combining civil sphere and framing, this study helps explain the powerful role mass media play in the effort by protest groups to challenge a dominant cultural or political norm.

In South Carolina, McCray’s *Lighthouse and Informer* employed what sociologist William Gamson has identified as a “collective action frame” to confront and eventually overwhelm the argument in favor of accommodation within the black community. In doing so, the newspaper encouraged black southerners to embrace a definition of freedom and full citizenship that historian Richard H. King has described as “autonomous” freedom. Under this concept of freedom, political participation is more than merely a means to end, a way to bargain collectively for the best available deal from society.

¹²⁸ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1966); Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978), 15-30.

Political action is instead a path to self-transformation and self-realization. As King wrote in his book *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, autonomous freedom derives from such characteristics as self-determination, pride, and self-respect. In this sense, political action is less about “the achievement of tangible gains” and more of what King calls a “religious conversion or therapeutic transformation” – the breaking free from “an old sense of self and from relationships of oppression and dependency.”¹²⁹ Black conservative accommodationists in 1940s South Carolina argued in practical terms; they accepted politics as merely the art of the possible. McCray and his colleagues framed the debate to emphasize the power of political action to restore black pride and self-respect.

Sociologists, political theorists, and communications scholars have cited the power of media frames to “construct social reality” for the public through the selection and emphasis of certain facts and narratives.¹³⁰ Social movement scholars have suggested some political actors are able to create alternative versions of social reality – to “break” a status quo frame and redefine a social problem. If media frames help the public construct social reality, then perhaps activists can generate counter-frames that redefine that reality

¹²⁹ Richard H. King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 26-27.

¹³⁰ Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*; Tuchman, *Making News*; Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); William A. Gamson & Andre Modigliani, “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power. A Constructionist Approach,” *American Journal of Sociology* 95, (1989): 1-37; William A. Gamson, *Talking Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Robert Entman. “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm,” *Journal of Communication* 43, (April, 1993): 51-59; Kevin Caragee & Wim Roefs. “The Neglect of Power in Recent Framing Research,” *Journal of Communication* 54, (February, 2004): 214-23.

and propose new solutions for solving social conflicts.¹³¹ In prose laced with anger, sarcasm, and occasional bitterness, McCray and his colleagues used the pages of the *Lighthouse and Informer* to help break the frame of African American acquiescence and accommodation in the Jim Crow South and communicate a message of agency and activism to black Carolinians.¹³²

The concepts of frame analysis and frame contests offer insights into the success the *Lighthouse and Informer* in shaping public opinion in the black community and creating a united black counterpublic in South Carolina in the early 1940s. In his study of face-to-face communication, sociologist Ervin Goffman said individuals use what he called a “primary framework” to process new information quickly and place it into context.¹³³ Gaye Tuchman was one of the first scholars to use frame analysis in the study of journalism. She argued that journalists use framing as a type of shortcut to help readers

¹³¹ William A. Gamson, Bruce A. Fireman, & Steven Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1982); William A. Gamson, “Political Discourse and Collective Action,” *International Journal of Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* 1 (January, 1988): 219-244; Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 1-9; David A. Snow & Robert D. Benford, “Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization,” *International Social Movement Research* 1 (January, 1988): 197-218; Snow and Benford, “Master Frames and Cycles of Protest,” in *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*, eds., Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1992); Benford and Snow, “Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 611-639.

¹³² Unfortunately, a full run of the *Lighthouse and Informer* does not exist. This study examined the 48 issues that remain, and focused its analysis on two key civil rights campaigns in South Carolina during the 1940s: the fight over equal pay for black teachers, followed by the battle for full voting rights in the Democratic Party. To supplement the analysis of the *Lighthouse and Informer*, the author reviewed the personal papers of John McCray and his chief colleagues, Osceola E. McKaine and Modjeska Monteith Simkins, as well as oral history interviews McCray granted in 1985 and 1986.

¹³³ Ervin Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (New York: Free Press, 1974).

and viewers interpret events beyond their everyday experience. Through this framing process, Tuchman said journalists and their audiences create a shared sense of how the world works and thus help create a socially constructed reality.¹³⁴ In his examination of media coverage of the student anti-war movement of the 1960s, Todd Gitlin delivered a widely cited definition of media framing: the process involves “principals of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of tacit little theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters.” For Gitlin, these “tacit little theories,” delivered over and over in the media, help create social reality.¹³⁵

Gitlin’s book, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media and the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, served as a bridge between the use of framing theory in media studies and in the exploration of social movements. In his study of the anti-war movement, Gitlin focused almost entirely on media frames. In 1982, William Gamson and his colleagues shifted the study of frame analysis from the media to the political actors. They tried to understand how social movements challenge widely accepted societal frames.¹³⁶ How do these movements “break” a status quo frame and help construct a new one? In Gamson’s view, a frame identifies a problem and prescribes a solution. For political actors and social movement leaders, the goal is to redefine a societal problem and offer a viable alternative solution, one that mobilizes people to act.

¹³⁴ Tuchman, *Making News*, 15-30; Berger and Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*.

¹³⁵ Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching*, 3-6.

¹³⁶ Gamson, Fireman and Rytina, *Encounters with Unjust Authority*.

Social movement theorists have identified these mobilizing solutions as *collective action frames*.¹³⁷

Gamson believes a successful collective action frame must include three components working simultaneously: identity, injustice, and agency. The message must identify an aggrieved group with shared concerns, convince the group it is the victim of an unjust act, and persuade the group it *can* change its circumstances – that the fight is worth the effort. For Gamson, agency is a critical component. He defined it as the “consciousness that it is possible to alter conditions or policies through collective action.”¹³⁸ McCray and his newspaper wanted to use the debate over black teacher pay to persuade African Americans to move from acquiescence to action – to become *agents* in their own history. In doing so, McCray and his NAACP allies created a united black counterpublic capable of delivering its interpretation of life under Jim Crow rule into the nation’s larger civil sphere.

The first big showdown in the newspaper’s campaign to demolish the culture of accommodation and unite the black community behind a strategy of protest came in the battle over equal pay for black teachers. Conservative black leaders framed the issue in accommodationist terms: they warned black teachers against the dangers of overreaching. The teachers should negotiate with the white board of education and cut the best deal

¹³⁷ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 6-8; Johnston & Noakes, *Frames of Protest – Social Movements and the Framing Perspective* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 7-11.

¹³⁸ William A. Gamson, “Promoting Political Engagement,” in *Mediated Politics. Communication in the Future of Democracy*, eds. Robert M. Entman and W. Lance Bennett (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

they could, even if it meant accepting something less than equal pay.¹³⁹ McCray and his colleagues presented a starkly different message. The *Lighthouse and Informer* framed the fight for the equalization of teacher salaries as a test of black self-respect. The newspaper's frame posed a simple question: Were African Americans ready to assume the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship?

The fight over teacher pay equalization in South Carolina triggered a classic frame contest within the black community. The debate pitted the NAACP and its allies against the leaders of the Palmetto State Teachers' Association, the black teachers organization. Headed by John P. Burgess, a high school principal and a well-known leader in the state's black community, the PTSA opposed the NAACP's plan to sue the state board of education. The group sought a negotiated settlement instead. The debate played out in the public and private spheres in South Carolina – in black newspapers, group meetings, neighborhood gatherings and private conversations. At one meeting of the PSTA membership in Columbia's Township Auditorium, Burgess stood before more than a thousand black educators and told them that “they are crazy little fools” if they believed the board of education would pay them the same as white teachers. The PSTA president said the teachers should be smart and negotiate for something less than equality. Otherwise, they risked being fired. Furthermore, Burgess told the group's rank-and-file to ignore “that ol' crazy newspaper” – the *Lighthouse and Informer* – which was urging

¹³⁹ The best account of the teacher pay battle can be found in: Richards, “Osceola E. McKaine and the Struggle for Black Civil Rights, 1917-1946”; The papers of both McCray and Simkins include accounts of the teacher pay fight as well.

teachers to sue the school board.¹⁴⁰ For many of the black teachers, Burgess' argument rang true. In the early 1940s in South Carolina, the forces calling for patience and negotiation over direct confrontation had a clear advantage. For the black community in the Jim Crow South, the threat of financial and physical retribution was real and omnipresent. Most families had relatives or friends who had felt the wrath of white anger firsthand.¹⁴¹ Some PSTA members believed mere membership in the NAACP could be a firing offense.¹⁴² On the other side, advocates of confrontation had few success stories with which to buttress their argument.

In 1943, the leadership of PTSA ignored NAACP complaints and sent a letter to the white state board of education requesting a pay increase for its members. Much like McCray's accommodationist letter back in 1937, the teachers' association tried to soothe the concerns of the state's white supremacists. Writing to the state board of education, the PTSA said: "We have come to you, a powerful, influential and authoritative group, begging you to help another group that is not so powerful." The language was similar to the tone used so often by Booker T. Washington and his South Carolina protégé, Richard Carroll, during the early years of Jim Crow. In 1895, Washington had written a famous letter to South Carolina Sen. "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman, a man best known for his support of lynching, that requested support for black schools: "I am but an humble member of an unfortunate race; you are a member of the greatest legislative body on earth, and a

¹⁴⁰ John McCray in oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, Feb. 18, 1985. Transcripts in author's possession.

¹⁴¹ Among the many examples, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind* and C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955).

¹⁴² John McCray oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, February 19, 1985. Transcripts in author's possession.

member of the great, intelligent Caucasian race.” Historian Leon Litwack has described the letter as “a classic example of accommodationism.”¹⁴³ Nearly half a century later, the PSTA leadership appeared to mimic Washington’s approach.

Modjeska Simkins responded with a devastating counterpunch published as an editorial under the headline “Negro Teachers Called To Arms.” In the *Lighthouse and Informer*, Simkins described the PSTA’s letter as a “stench bomb” that embarrassed “self-respecting Negroes in all walks of life.” She called the PSTA’s effort to negotiate “nauseating,” and she sent a clear message to the rank and file of the black teachers group:

Vow to strike forever from the ... ranks of the PSTA any cringing, groveling creature who is so distorted in his thinking, and so moronic in his power of expression that he removes the Negro teachers of this state from the ranks of the freeborn and places them in the category of whimpering slaves ... Resolve now that you will acquit yourselves as American citizens and not as sniveling, crawling nonentities. Believe me, that BEGGING will not improve your economic condition, or any other condition for that matter.”¹⁴⁴

The confrontational tone of Simkins’ editorial reflected the bitterness of the frame contest over strategy. “Swear vengeance against your ‘misleaders,’” Simkins urged the black teachers. “Single out your delegates from your county and demand proof of how

¹⁴³ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 360.

¹⁴⁴ Modjeska Montieth Simkins, “Black Teachers Called to Arms,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, 1943. Article found in MMS Papers, Politics: Reel 2.

each stood.”¹⁴⁵ Simkins framed the debate clearly to pick a fight with the group’s leaders, to create a stark contrast between her will to fight and their desire to negotiate. As she noted in a later interview, she understood their fear and caution. The PSTA leaders were well known in the community and were vulnerable to white retribution. “(They) didn’t want the whites to know that they would sit in a meeting and allow black teachers to sue the state of South Carolina,” she said years later.¹⁴⁶ However, she was not interested in preserving unity or showing the PSTA leadership any compassion; she wanted to persuade black Carolinians to go into battle – and to shame those too afraid to fight. Simkins wanted to convince them of their *agency* to confront an unjust system.

Gamson believes the agency component of a collective action frame must be tied closely to efficacy. The frame must empower people as agents in their own history, but also “deny the immutability of some undesirable situation.”¹⁴⁷ In the *Lighthouse and Informer*, Simkins framed the goal of the battle over teacher pay carefully to avoid a debate over winning or losing the court case. Instead, she said black South Carolinians had a choice: they could assert their rights like “American citizens,” or they could retreat like “whimpering slaves.” The agency comes not necessarily from winning the lawsuit, but from simply filing it in the first place. In this sense, she is redefining “citizenship” in a way that is consistent with Richard H. King’s concept of “autonomous freedom.” In tracing the “repertory of freedom” as articulated throughout the civil rights movement, King identifies “autonomous freedom” as a kind of self-realization – a rejection of the old, oppressed self and a declaration of personal freedom. Those who embrace

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Aba-Mecha, “Black Woman Activist in Twentieth Century South Carolina, Modjeska Monteith Simkins,” 165.

¹⁴⁷ Gamson, *Talking Politics*, 7.

autonomous freedom are willing to stand up and demand their rights, even if they expect to face retribution for doing so. In this sense, politics is not the art of the possible; instead, it is a path to self-respect through the assertion of your rights. To fight for those rights – whether you win every battle or not – is a way of declaring yourself a citizen.¹⁴⁸ McCray made the same case in a 1947 column that looked back on the teacher fight. He described a white “Democrat” who counseled him to be “less conspicuous” in making political demands. “The question about being nice and quiet, just because white folks ask,” McCray wrote, “is that it never pays dividends”¹⁴⁹ – perhaps a lesson he learned from his earlier accommodationist days.

The Simkins editorial reflected the bitterness of the battle between the accommodationists and the protestors. To reframe the issue and force a choice by the community, the *Lighthouse and Informer* had to draw sharp distinctions between negotiation and confrontation. As McCray knew from personal experience, most black Carolinians vacillated in their support for direct confrontation. Was this the right time, or were African Americans risking a major white backlash? The tone of the debate also engendered criticism. The paper came under fire from those who believed African Americans should remain unified and from those who thought it unseemly to air their debate in public for whites to see and hear. Later in 1943, McKaine addressed the question of unity in the newspaper’s signature combative tone: “If, to have unity, we must continue to follow and support a leadership which has, without effective protest or action, permitted the Negroes of this state to become the most illiterate group within the

¹⁴⁸ King, *Civil Rights and the Idea of Freedom*, 26-27.

¹⁴⁹ John H. McCray, “The Need for Changing,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, June 15, 1947, 4.

nation ... if to have unity we must continue to support and follow such leadership then the price is too high.”¹⁵⁰

Despite the bitterness, the NAACP activists prevailed and managed to gain support for their lawsuit. The first black plaintiff, a young teacher from Charleston, got cold feet and dropped her case.¹⁵¹ But a second teacher replaced her, and in February 1944, a young NAACP lawyer named Thurgood Marshall argued the first teacher-pay case against the Charleston board of education in the federal courthouse in Charleston. Marshall had expected to lose in Charleston and perhaps win the case on appeal. But much to his surprise, a judge named J. Waites Waring – the son of a Charleston aristocratic family and at that time a member in good standing of the Democratic Party – sided with the NAACP and ordered the school board to equalize the pay.¹⁵²

Waring’s ruling in the teacher-pay case was the first step in his evolution from white supremacist Democratic to full-throated supporter of black equality in the South. A loyal supporter of white supremacy and the racial status quo across the 1930s, Waring was an ally of US Senator “Cotton” Ed Smith, a demagogue who broke with Roosevelt in part over the race issue. Smith rallied his supporters across rural South Carolina with his oft-told story of how he walked out of the 1936 Democratic National Convention in “Philadelphia” when a black minister began to deliver the invocation. “When the blue-gummed Senagambian started talking, I started walking,” Smith would say to the

¹⁵⁰ Osceola E. McKaine, “What Price Unity?” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, Jan. 10, 1943, 4.

¹⁵¹ Richards, “Osceola E. McKaine,” 137-138.

¹⁵² See, Tinsley Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waites Waring and Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 43-46; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 128-132; Richards, “Osceola E. McKaine,” 144.

cheering crowds.¹⁵³ In 1938, Smith was one of several southern senators the White House targeted for defeat in Democratic primaries, but with Waring serving as his Charleston campaign manager, Smith defied the New Dealers and won re-election in a landslide. Smith rewarded Waring for his loyalty by helping to clear the way for Waring's appointment to the federal judgeship in 1941.

After the teacher-pay ruling in 1943, Waring's social life underwent a radical change that would help sever his ties with white Charleston – and perhaps help nudge forward his new commitment to civil rights. For more than 32 years, Waring had been married to Annie Gammell, the daughter of a respected Charleston family and a familiar face at the city's annual society balls in the fashionable neighborhood south of Broad Street. By late 1945, however, rumors began to spread about the Waring's marriage. Sometime earlier that year, Waring had met and fallen in love with Elizabeth Hoffmann, the wife of a wealthy Connecticut textile manufacturer who had a winter home south of Broad. Divorce was still illegal in South Carolina at the time, but Waring was apparently determined to end the marriage. The judge sent his wife to stay with his sister in Florida while she established residency and filed for divorce there. To make matters more tantalizing for the Charleston gossip mill, Judge Waring would be his new wife's third husband. Originally from Detroit, Elizabeth Avery had divorced her first husband, attorney Wilson Mills, to marry Hoffmann. Elizabeth Waring was an intelligent and charming person, and Waring's male friends in Charleston would later say they understood why he initially fell in love with her. However, as one former law partner put it, "She was also a Yankee, and she had those characteristics. Those women just don't

¹⁵³ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 507.

seem to have the same manner as southern women have. They are a little more aggressive.”¹⁵⁴

It was true that Elizabeth Waring read much more widely and deeply than the judge’s former wife. And on the issue of race, the new Mrs. Waring and her husband began to explore points of view beyond the narrow confines of the *Charleston News and Courier* and other southern news media. They were particularly moved by the findings published in *An American Dilemma*, Gunnar Myrdal’s investigation into “the Negro problem and American democracy.” Funded by the Carnegie Foundation and published in 1944, Myrdal’s massive two-volume study depicted in painstaking detail the degree of black misery in America. The book sought to answer one perplexing question: How could a country built on such liberal ideals as freedom and equality allow the wholesale oppression of one-tenth of its citizens? Myrdal provided an optimistic answer. He believed northern whites were unaware of the depth of white oppression in the South, and he believed they would reject racism and white supremacy once they fully understood its vile impact on the nation’s democratic life.¹⁵⁵ Myrdal believed northern public opinion would play a crucial role in the coming fight over black civil rights. Many decades later, as he developed the theory of the civil sphere in his efforts to understand and explain social change in American democracy, Jeffrey Alexander would support Myrdal’s contention.

As the Warings expanded their reading about race relations, they grew increasingly disturbed. “I couldn’t take it at first, I used to say it wasn’t true, it couldn’t

¹⁵⁴ D.A. Brockington, Jr., interview with Tinsley Yarbough, as cited in Yarbough, *A Passion for Justice*.

¹⁵⁵ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*; Jackson, *Gunnar Myrdal and America’s Conscience*.

be,” Judge Waring later told *Collier's* magazine. “I would put the books down, so troubled I couldn't look at them.”¹⁵⁶ Waring's shift in allegiance provided dramatic evidence of change within the nation's civil sphere; the African American movement was now gaining empathy and winning allies in the North and the South too.¹⁵⁷

Waring's ruling in the teacher pay case surprised white leaders in South Carolina, most of whom had failed to notice that cracks that had begun to undermine their community's solidarity on the race issue. In 1920, when black activism mobilized in the state, white supremacists could crush the movement with little fear of its impact on northern public opinion. By 1943, with the nation now embroiled in another world war, and with northern white Democrats working harder to lure black voters, the cultural milieu had changed. The arguments that Du Bois and his colleagues had delivered with such passion two decades earlier had won few converts in the larger white audience back then. The black counterpublic was not as strong and could be easily ignored by white northerners. In the 1940s, however, these same arguments began to resonate in the mainstream public, and this shift in the cultural landscape began to effect political decision-making. The black press and its powerful “Double V” campaign made the link between fascism abroad and racial oppression at home at least somewhat harder for whites to ignore. Black activists like labor leader A. Phillip Randolph could point out this

¹⁵⁶ Samuel Grafton, “Lonesomest Man in Town,” *Collier's*, April 29, 1950, 49; see also, Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waites Waring and Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹⁵⁷ Bedingfield, “John H. McCray, Accommodationism, and the Framing of the Civil Rights Struggle in South Carolina”; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 129-133; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 256; David W. Southern, “Beyond Jim Crow Liberalism: Judge Waring's Fight Against Segregation in South Carolina, 1942-52,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 1981; Tinsley E. Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice: J. Waites Waring and Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

hypocrisy and force the Democratic president to take his arguments seriously.¹⁵⁸ White supremacists continued to claim that blacks were happy under Jim Crow, and that outside agitators, many of them with Communist Party ties, were the source of any discontent. With the emergence of the Cold War, the argument concerning Communists would gain traction in the late 1940s and 50s. But the notion that African Americans were content with their status in the South, and that white violence, while unfortunate, was necessary to maintain a democratic way of life, was growing increasingly difficult to sell.

One Southern white leader who grasped this change and tried to take advantage of it was, surprisingly, J. Strom Thurmond. After fighting in Europe during the war, Thurmond returned to his home in Edgefield, South Carolina, and ran for governor. Thurmond campaigned in 1946 as a New Deal reformer and a moderate on the racial issue. In neighboring Georgia that year, Gene Talmadge made defense of white supremacy his primary issue, but in South Carolina Thurmond focused on economic progress and downplayed race. He supported segregation, obviously, but in his campaign speeches he championed a prosperous and industrialized South that would benefit both races. In his inaugural address, he even proposed increased spending on African American schools to help prepare the race to thrive in the new economy.¹⁵⁹ In this sense, Thurmond was an early proponent of a new interpretation of Jim Crow, one that softened

¹⁵⁸ See, for example: Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Cornelius L. Bynum, *A. Phillip Randolph and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Champaign: University of Illinois, 2010).

¹⁵⁹ For details on Thurmond's 1946 campaign and his role in South Carolina and national politics in general, see: Joseph Crespiro, *Strom Thurmond's America: ...* and Jason Morgan ward, *Defending White Democracy...*

its harsher edges of white supremacy and presented it as a way to move toward a better future for both races.¹⁶⁰

Waring's ruling on teacher pay provided the sort of tangible victory McCray and his NAACP allies needed to convince wary blacks that change was possible in South Carolina, that the 1940s movement would not be a sad replay of the 1920s. In rural parts of the state, however, African Americans believed white supremacists retained their most powerful weapon – the ability to use violence without fear of retribution. And events appeared to support their fears. In 1946, a war veteran named Isaac Woodard was blinded by Batesburg police officers who beat him after Woodard got into minor dispute with a white bus driver. And in 1947, a group of white taxi drivers broke into the nearby Pickens County jail and lynched Willie Earl, a black man accused of murdering another white cab driver. The Woodard case drew national attention, but it ended the way most violence against blacks had always ended – without any action from local authorities. The Willie Earl case was different, however, and it signaled a significant change in northern and southern culture.

Thurmond would become the segregationist presidential candidate of 1948 and a leader of “massive resistance” to civil rights in the mid-1950s. With the Earl lynching, Thurmond had an opportunity to employ the tactics of his predecessors, Tillman and Blease. They had often criticized mob violence as unfortunate, but complained that the black quest for racial equality had violated southern mores and thus triggered the violence. Through these statements, they signaled the government's approval of white violence to contain black aspirations, even though the lawmakers claimed to oppose those

who took the law in their own hands. In 1947, Thurmond did just the opposite. He not only criticized the lynching as unacceptable, but the governor committed the heretical act of calling in the federal government -- the FBI -- to investigate the case and bring charges against the white criminals. The trial attracted press from across the world – the famed British journalist Rebecca West described the trial as “The Greenville Opera” in *The New Yorker* – and even though the all-white jury refused to convict, the governor’s firm support for federal prosecution confirmed that changes were afoot. Thurmond was no liberal on race relations. But the governor seemed to understand that overwhelming, state-sanctioned violence would no longer be accepted by national public opinion.¹⁶¹

The victory in the teacher pay case and the national attention paid to the Isaac Woodard and Willie Earl cases emboldened African Americans to join the NAACP’s fight for political and civil rights in South Carolina. By 1948, the number of dues-paying members in the state had exceeded 14,000, up from only about 800 a decade earlier. McCray had been arguing in favor of black political involvement since the late 1930s.¹⁶² He repeatedly emphasized the potential political clout of a black community that comprised “46 percent of the population, a majority in 22 of the 46 counties” and in four of six Congressional districts in South Carolina.¹⁶³ If blacks could get to the ballot box,

¹⁶¹ Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson. *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond*. (New York: Public Affairs. 2005), 42-48; Joseph Crespino, *Strom Thurmond’s America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 51-56; Rebecca West, “Opera in Greenville,” *The New Yorker*, June 14, 1947, 31-65.

¹⁶² Some examples: John McCray, “Sticking Together,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, 19 January, 1947, 4; McCray, “Primary Test Looms,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, 9 February, 1947, 4.

¹⁶³ John McCray, “No Apparent Unity,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, 6 February, 1944, 4.

they could exercise enormous political power. Of course, white Carolinians could do the math as well, and most were determined to keep blacks out.

The New Deal era had triggered a shift in American politics. During the Depression, Roosevelt's New Deal economic policies attracted support from black Americans. In 1936, the national Democratic Party actively solicited northern black votes for the first time in a presidential race, and tens of thousands of African Americans cast their ballots for FDR that November.¹⁶⁴ Southern blacks embraced Roosevelt and the New Deal as well, despite the racially discriminatory way most New Deal programs were implemented.¹⁶⁵ A headline in the *New York Times* in August captured the political sea change: "Negro Vote Jumps in South Carolina – Rush to Register is Ascribed by Official to Desire to Support Roosevelt."¹⁶⁶ Technically, southern blacks could vote in general elections, although whites used legal and extralegal means to block turnout. But blacks in the South were banned entirely from participating in the Democratic Party. Since the turn of the century, southern Democrats had barred blacks from joining the party and participating in its primaries. In the one-party rule of the Solid South, with only nominal Republican opposition, the Democratic primary was the main event; winning the primary was tantamount to winning the office. To participate fully in politics, blacks had to gain entrance to the Democratic Party.

¹⁶⁴ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 143-144.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid; Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

¹⁶⁶ "Negro Vote Jumps..." *The New York Times*, August 22, 1936, as cited in Hoffman, "The Genesis of the Modern Movement for Civil Rights in South Carolina," 364.

In the late 1930s, the NAACP's legal arm launched an assault on the all-white primary. It filed suit in Texas charging that that state's primary system violated the Fifteenth Amendment to the constitution guaranteeing African Americans the right to vote. The state of Texas argued that primaries were the private concerns of each political party and not a part of the state's statutory election law. But on April 3, 1944, the US Supreme Court surprised the South by siding with the NAACP. In *Smith v. Allwright*,¹⁶⁷ the court said the party primary played a significant role in the electoral process and thus represented a delegation of official state power and must be governed by the constitution.¹⁶⁸ It was a landmark victory for the emerging civil rights movement. But for John McCray and his fellow activists, the fight to enter South Carolina Democratic Party politics had just begun.

A few days after the *Smith v. Allwright* ruling, McCray sat in the balcony of the South Carolina Statehouse and watched in horror as state lawmakers moved to circumvent the court order. In what came to be known as the "extraordinary session," Governor Olin Johnston told the lawmakers: "White supremacy will be maintained in our primaries. Let the chips fall where they may."¹⁶⁹ The legislature threw out all state laws concerning political parties and ordered the parties to establish their own rules and regulations governing their primaries. Since the state would have no connection with political parties, party elections would become the private concerns of independent organizations and would not fall under constitutional scrutiny.

¹⁶⁷ *Smith v. Allwright*, 321 U.S. 649 (1944).

¹⁶⁸ *Smith v. Allwright*; Darlene Clark Hine, "Blacks and the Destruction of the White Primary 1935-1944," *Journal of Negro History*, 62, 1, (January 1977), 43-59.

¹⁶⁹ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*; Lau, *Democracy Rising*; McCray, "The Way It Was," *Charleston Chronicle*, March 13 March, 1982.

To mount a legal challenge to the new primary system in South Carolina, the NAACP needed to find a black voter who had registered in the Democratic Party but had been denied a vote in the party's primary. This was harder to do than it sounded. White Democrats controlled the process and they moved the party's registration books around surreptitiously. It was like a shell game: a registration book would open at a local store, but when a black voter approached, the book would abruptly close, only to reopen the next day at a different location. The stalling technique worked in 1944 and ensured another election year with an all-white Democratic primary.

Rather than accept that outcome and wait patiently for the legal process to unfold, McCray responded with a bold move. He and Osceola McKaine used the pages of the *Lighthouse and Informer* to launch a black political organization, one designed to empower the African American community and challenge the white Democrats. Initially called the South Carolina Colored Democratic Party, McCray and McKaine changed the name to the Progressive Democratic Party in late April 1944 and opened the doors to white members. But it is clear that McCray saw the party as a way to motivate black activism and to generate a sense of agency in the African-American community. The party would stay in operation, he wrote, "so long as it shall be necessary to have group action in the matter of group rights and privileges."¹⁷⁰

To the dismay of some national Democrats, McCray carried out his pledge to challenge the state's white slate of delegates at the party's national convention in Chicago

¹⁷⁰ "South Carolina Colored Democratic Party Organizational Plans," JHM Papers: Politics, General, Reel 7. See also, Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 43; Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice*, 283-284; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 145-146; Lau, *Democracy Rising*; McCray, "The Way It Was," *Charleston Chronicle*, March 13, 1982.

that summer. As Patricia Sullivan has argued, the Democratic Party was at a crossroads on racial issues in 1944. Roosevelt was caught between growing black support in the North and an increasingly wary white supremacist wing in the South. It was an alliance that could not hold, and McCray wanted southern blacks to help break it apart. If South Carolina's black slate of delegates is not seated, he said, "there will be devil to pay." McCray predicted northern blacks would abandon Roosevelt and perhaps swing the election to the Republicans if the Democrats refused to seat his delegation. To no one's surprise, the national Democratic Party's credentials committee disqualified McCray's PDP slate on a technicality and the white South Carolina Democrats were seated. But McCray used the high-profile moment in Chicago to help organize black activism back home. The PDP nominated Osceola McKaine to run for the Senate in the fall and turned his campaign into a recruitment drive to motivate blacks across the state to join both the NAACP and the PDP.¹⁷¹

With the *Lighthouse and Informer's* full editorial support, McKaine campaigned in nearly every county in the state in 1944, and he used this platform to challenge black South Carolinians to join the battle for political rights. In doing so, he again framed the issue to emphasize the concept of "autonomous freedom." The battle will be a "painful, bitter struggle," he said at one stop. But if black men and women reject the idea of being a "ruled" group, they "must be willing to make every sacrifice necessary to obtain the right to vote."¹⁷² In McKaine's narrative, black agency would come not from winning a

¹⁷¹ John McCray oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, February 18, 1985. Author in possession of transcript; McCray, "The Way It Was," *Charleston Chronicle*, March 13, 4.

¹⁷² Osceola E. McKaine, "Black Voters at the Ballot Box," Southern Youth Negro Council, 1944. JHM Papers: Politics, Reel 7.

tangible victory in the election, but simply from joining the fight for equal rights. In this sense, the PDP's senatorial campaign succeeded. By the end of the fall, the party claimed to have 45,000 members. However, the final election results showed the PDP with only 5,000 votes. An outraged McCray charged that white election officials prevented many blacks from voting and failed to count the ballots of those who did. He reached out to Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP for help. McCray knew the PDP had no chance of winning the election, but he feared that giving in to the fraud without a fight would undermine the momentum and sense of agency McKaine's campaign had generated in the black community. As McCray explained in a letter to Marshall: "We have had a hell of a job beating down the fear in these people, in getting their trust and hopes and don't intend to see them come down with their ballot ... to be robbed, intimidated and frustrated."¹⁷³

Marshall filed a complaint with the US Justice Department and McKaine contested the election in the US Senate, but neither body took action. Nonetheless, the PDP had succeeded in carrying out McCray's primary goals: to move the black community to act and to deliver to the state and the nation a consistent and unified interpretation of how mistreatment of southern blacks undermined and contradicted the ideals of the larger American democracy. A man of no small ego, McCray later described the creation of the PDP as "brazen, daring and smart ... a single act of terrorism for white supremacists in a state where by sheer numbers blacks" held enormous political potential. The new party, McCray said, "was controlled by blacks, by selected people who wanted no 'under the table' payoffs nor ... pats on the shoulder. That kind of operation scares the

¹⁷³ John H. McCray to Thurgood Marshall, November 9, 1944, NAACP Papers II-B, 2009; See also: Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 191.

daylights out of racist supremacists. It also baffles those blacks who thrive on sell outs.”¹⁷⁴

In the next election year, 1946, McCray and his colleagues tried again to get a black voter enrolled in the Democratic Party and thus launch a new legal challenge against the all-white primary. The activists had failed to overcome the trickery of the white Democrats throughout the spring of 1946 and were growing desperate. Finally, an unlikely hero emerged. As McCray tells the story, he and three other NAACP activists were standing outside a small store in Columbia’s ninth ward. They had seen whites enrolling in the store, but every time a black voter entered the woman behind the counter claimed the enrollment book was not there. As McCray and his colleagues were about to leave, a cab driver named George Elmore drove up. McCray described Elmore as a “pest” who “bugged” everybody with his endless chatter and general nosiness. They barely spoke to him, but soon Elmore learned what they were up to. He asked if he could try to enroll. McCray described the group’s response as, “Sure, good riddance and relief!” A light-skinned Negro, Elmore walked into the store and, to the amazement of McCray and his colleagues, the woman pulled out the registration book and let him sign up. As soon as she saw his address, however, she realized he was a Negro. By then, she had grown weary of the process as well. She told Elmore to “tell the rest of them damn niggers they

¹⁷⁴ McCray, “The Way It Was,” *Charleston Chronicle*, February 27 and March 13, 1982.

can come in and register too.” With Elmore, the NAACP had its plaintiff in a new legal assault on the party’s all-white primary.¹⁷⁵

Thurgood Marshall returned to South Carolina to argue the case in federal court in Columbia in the summer of 1947. Once again, US District Judge J. Waites Waring of Charleston presided. And if his ruling in the teacher equalization case surprised white South Carolinians, his judgment in the primary suit sent them into shock. “It is time for South Carolina to rejoin the Union,” the judge wrote in his decision. “Racial discrimination cannot exist in the machinery that selects offices and lawmakers.”¹⁷⁶ By August of 1948, Waring had overturned two Democratic Party appeals and the all-white primary was finally dead in South Carolina. McCray hailed the rulings in an editorial headlined “The White Primary Goes Out.” But he put South Carolina blacks on notice, as well:

The next step is to make certain that the victory is not half a loaf, an empty one. To be certain, feverish efforts will be made to deny this new privilege ... The success of this effort will depend on the inclination of Negroes to tolerate or reject it ... The clarion call against the primary ... was ‘all or none.’ And this, henceforth, is the watchword. No membership in the party is complete without all the rights attending that membership. Only through such a stand can the court’s

¹⁷⁵ McCray, “The Way It Was,” *Charleston Chronicle*, February 27 and March 13, 1982; McCray account in oral history interview recounted in Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, and Beall, “With Malice Intent.”

¹⁷⁶ *Elmore v. Rice*, 72 F. Supp. 516, 528

ruling be made practical. Only in this fashion can it be said that ‘government of all the people by the few of one people’ has perished from the earth.¹⁷⁷

McCray’s *Lighthouse and Informer* challenged the black community in 1940s South Carolina with a powerful collective action frame that helped overcome a culture of accommodation and usher in the modern civil rights movement. By uniting African Americans behind a strategy of protest, the newspaper helped create a robust black counterpublic that disseminated powerful denunciations of racial discrimination and injustice. These interpretations of civic life in the South helped attract valuable white allies, including a federal district judge whose rulings undermined white political dominance in the state and drew national attention to the civil rights struggle in South Carolina. The ability to sway public opinion in the North and win empathetic allies would propel the movement forward and eventually force the white South to launch new campaigns to resist black inclusion in the civil sphere.

During the early 1940s, as the black movement grew in South Carolina, the state’s white press mostly ignored it. They doubted local African Americans had the intelligence or the courage to confront white rule in a serious way. For McCray and his allies, however, the era of protest politics was just beginning. By 1948, white South Carolinians could no longer ignore this fact, and they began to engage in a serious debate about how to respond.

¹⁷⁷ John McCray, “The White Primary Goes Out,” *The Lighthouse and Informer*, April 25, 1948, 4.

CHAPTER 4

THE WHITE PRESS AND THE DIXIECRATS

Across the 1940s, South Carolina's white newspapers competed for circulation and influence – the *State* and the *Columbia Record* in the state capital of Columbia; the *News and Courier* and the *Charleston Evening Post* in the historic port city; the *Greenville News* and the Spartanburg papers, the *Herald* and the *Journal*, in the foothills of the north; and the *Florence Morning News* in the tobacco-growing northeast region along the Pee Dee River. They relied heavily on the Associated Press and United Press to follow major events, and on many days their lead news stories were identical. The differences came on the editorial page, specifically in the unsigned editorials, where each paper tried to distinguish itself through its editorial voice.¹⁷⁸ Publishers competed to hire editors who could deliver compelling commentary, who could be “lively” and “argumentative” to attract readers.¹⁷⁹ Much as modern television networks rely on star pundits, the newspapers depended on their editorialists to brand their publications and build circulation.

In the early years of the decade, the white editorialists took note of the civil rights movement in the state, but most treated it as a minor annoyance, not an existential threat to white political power. In the first year of World War II, they raised concerns about a

¹⁷⁸ Based on the author's review of South Carolina newspapers during the time period.

¹⁷⁹ John D. Stark, *Damned Upcountryman: William Watts Ball: A Study in American Conservatism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968), 123.

War Department plan to make it easier for soldiers to vote because they feared it would increase black registration in the state.¹⁸⁰ They were mildly surprised in 1943 when Judge J. Waites Waring used sharp language in demanding the state equalize pay for black teachers in the state, but the editors supported the concept of the “separate but equal” doctrine. The next year, when the US Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* that state Democratic parties could no longer exclude primary voters based solely on race, they expressed greater concern, but were confident that whites would retain control of the party.¹⁸¹ When John McCray used his black newspaper to form the Progressive Democratic Party and challenge the seating of the state’s white delegates at the 1944 Democratic National Convention, the *Columbia Record* dismissed the PDP, saying its leaders “talked too much.”¹⁸²

Despite evidence to the contrary, the white press appeared convinced that the majority of the state’s black community remained politically content and that white dominance was not under serious threat. Yet led by McCray’s *Lighthouse and Informer* and his NAACP allies, the once quiescent black community in South Carolina had coalesced into a vibrant counterpublic capable of disseminating their own interpretation of civic life. They had dispensed with the accommodationist strategy and begun to assert their rights as full citizens of American democracy. This change began in the early 1940s, but white editors would mostly ignore it until late in the decade. As one member of McCray’s political organization said in writing to a white journalist in 1948: “The type of

¹⁸⁰ For more on the importance of the soldier voting debate, see: Robert A. Garson, *The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana Press University, 1974), 38.

¹⁸¹ *Smith v. Allwright*.

¹⁸² “Mayberry says Negro Move is Doomed,” *Columbia Record*, May 27, 1944, 4A.

Negro I represent you have never met. You have never talked with – you have only a superficial knowledge of.”¹⁸³ And this appeared to be true, based on how African Americans were portrayed in the white press.

During the 1940s, black South Carolinians appeared in white newspapers as suspects in crime stories and as the butt of jokes based on disparaging stereotypes. The editorial page of the state’s largest newspaper, *The State* in Columbia, published a regular cartoon series called Hambone that portrayed an elderly “Sambo” character who dispensed pearls of wisdom in deep dialect. In one example, Hambone is shown whittling on a piece of wood as he says: “Doctuh en Lawyuh en Preachuhs, dey de onlies’ one’s gets paid fuh tryin’ – win er lose!” In Charleston, the *News and Courier* frequently ran short editorials making fun of the supposedly loose morals of the black community. When the state’s General Assembly considered legalizing divorce, for example, the *News and Courier* suggested the new law would be a boon for black attorneys. “Divorce will rapidly come to be fashionable among the colored people,” the newspaper said. “Attorneys of their race will soon appear in all counties.”¹⁸⁴

In the early 1940s, McCray and his NAACP allies benefited from the lack of interest paid by the state’s white press. They were granted space to gather resources and build a viable black counterpublic without the daily newspapers rallying white opposition. White politicians occasionally vilified African Americans and raised the specter of a black political and social threat. In 1943, for example, Governor R.M.

¹⁸³ A.J. Clement to William D. Workman, Jr., July 19, 1948. WDW Papers: Campaigns, 1948.

¹⁸⁴ J.W. Alley, “Hambone,” *The State*, November 2, 1949, A4; “Colored Attorneys’ Practice,” *Charleston News and Courier*, January 6, 1949, A4.

Jeffries ordered an investigation of so-called “Eleanor Clubs” in the state. Encouraged by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, these black workers were allegedly plotting such subversive acts as entering white homes through the front door. “Perhaps this movement is connected with plans of the Communists to foment a ‘black revolution’ in the South,” one Charleston resident wrote to the governor.¹⁸⁵

White editors downplayed such threats. Despite the evidence of rising black political assertiveness in the state, the largest white newspapers depicted black South Carolinians as docile and relatively harmless – perhaps easily swayed by “outside agitators,” but posing no existential threat to the status quo. By 1947, however, it became clear that the black push for inclusion in the nation’s civil sphere had gained support in the North. When President Truman proposed the first civil rights reform measure since Reconstruction, the leading white newspapers in South Carolina would react in shock. They would join with white politicians to debate the proper region’s response, and in doing so would come to realize that the old arguments that conflated white supremacy and racial separation with “American democracy” had lost their ability to persuade in the shifting public opinion of the northern civil sphere. By the end of the decade, after the failed Dixiecrat presidential campaign of South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond, they would begin the search for new ways of defending white political rule in the South.

In the 1940s, the white press in South Carolina was dominated by a particular brand of conservatism, one exemplified by a paternalistic and dismissive view of African

¹⁸⁵ For more on Jeffries and the search for “Eleanor Clubs,” see: Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Southern Politics* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2011, 52-53.

Americans in the South. Led by the *News and Courier* in Charleston and *The State* in Columbia, the South Carolina press favored the aristocratic notions that had been preached by the state's old planter-class elite. In short, they believed in a hierarchical society in which all classes knew their "place." They believed the so-called "Negro question" had been settled and that southern blacks accepted their particular place on society's bottom rung. Northern agitators occasionally stirred up trouble, they contended, but blacks in South Carolina were mostly an affable lot who were content with the status quo.

By 1948, however, the white editors realized what they now confronted. Black activists like Charleston's A.J. Clement did not sound like someone who accepted second-class citizenship. In his letter to a *News and Courier* journalist, Clement sounded like an American patriot appealing to the most sacred values embedded in the nation's democratic heritage. "The things that the modern Negro wants are things of the heart – they are things eternal," Clement wrote. "Mankind has always sought them and in his seeking he will not be denied. For Right and Justice, Fair play, and Understanding – in the long run – always win out."¹⁸⁶

The state's white press and white politicians struggled to develop a new narrative that could justify the continuation of the old ways in South Carolina. For the past half-century, the leading white editorialists at the state's major newspapers had bemoaned the rise of the white working class as a political power in the state. They had embraced a particular type of conservatism that often worried as much about class as it did race. Ironically, the planter-class elites who first espoused this ideology had lost their great

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

political struggle against Ben Tillman, Cole Blease and other “reformers” at the turn of the century, yet in the 1940s their worldview was thriving on the editorial pages of the state’s largest newspapers.

These so-called Bourbon conservatives – led by former Confederate generals Wade Hampton and Matthew Butler – had ruled the state since taking power in the fraudulent election of 1876.¹⁸⁷ With the help of Tillman and other young militia leaders, the former Confederates ousted a Republican government that had come to power with the support of African American votes. In the parlance of the times, Hampton and his supporters had “redeemed” South Carolina from the horrors of Reconstruction.¹⁸⁸ The Bourbons supported economic growth, particularly the push for more industry in the South, but they were most concerned about social order. As historian Joel Williamson has noted, planter class conservatives were obsessed with place. In their view, the nightmare of Reconstruction had allowed the lower orders – blacks and working-class whites – to abandon their proper place in society and join elite whites in participating in politics and governance.

After taking power in 1876, the Hampton and the white Democrats sought to overturn the changes wrought by Reconstruction and restore a strictly regimented society in which everyone knew their place. It was a system that empowered elite landowners at the top and kept poorer whites near the bottom, just one step ahead of the former slaves. Unlike Tillman, Blease, and the radical reformers who would later impose the violent tyranny of Jim Crow, planter-class aristocrats believed they had nothing to fear from the

¹⁸⁷ The name “Bourbon” refers to the reign of Louis XI, which had restored the monarchy in France after the French Revolution and the rise Napoleon Bonaparte.

¹⁸⁸ Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 64-79.

freed blacks. They simply thought blacks were an inferior race and, like poor whites, needed guidance and protection provided by the better class.¹⁸⁹ Even after federal troops had been withdrawn from South Carolina, Hampton's government solicited African American votes, although Tillman and other militia leaders made sure only a handful of blacks would actually cast their ballots.¹⁹⁰

By 1890, Tillman and his allies had grown weary of Hampton's paternalistic leadership. Tillman's base of support came from the small farmers who had always resented Hampton and the big landowners. They had formed an uneasy alliance in opposition to the Republicans and Reconstruction, but that partnership was coming to an end. The national economic downturn of the 1880s had been especially severe for small farmers in the South, and agrarian uprisings had destabilized the political status quo across the region. In neighboring Georgia, for example, the Populist Party had brought together white yeoman farmers and African Americans in a brief but powerful bi-racial coalition.¹⁹¹ In North Carolina, so-called fusionist candidates ran with the support of white Republicans and African American votes. For Tillman, the growth of bi-racial coalitions posed an unacceptable threat to white rule. He supported the "Mississippi Plan," a strategy that would disenfranchise African Americans in the South and use all

¹⁸⁹ Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race – Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. (Oxford University Press, 1984), 79-85.

¹⁹⁰ Kantrowitz, Ben *Tillman*, 80-95.

¹⁹¹ C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York: McMillan, 1938; Galaxy Books, 1963).

means necessary – including violence – to limit black advancement and ensure they remained on society’s lowest rung.¹⁹²

In 1890, Tillman rallied the state’s small farmers to challenge the Bourbon conservatives for control of the state’s Democratic Party. He would ride his “agrarian reform” and white supremacy movement to the governor’s mansion and eventually a seat in the US Senate. Later, Blease would add the state’s growing number of so-called “lint heads” – textile mill workers – to the Tillman coalition and also win races for governor and senator.

During the rise of Tillman and Blease, the state’s dominant newspaper – Charleston’s *News and Courier* – sided with Hampton and the planter-class Bourbons. In the post-bellum years, editor Francis “Captain” Dawson had turned the Low Country newspaper into a journalistic powerhouse. Although born and raised in England, Dawson had fallen in love with the Confederacy and had moved to South Carolina in 1861 to join the cause. After the war, he had worked at the *Charleston Mercury* under the former fire-breathing secessionist, Robert Barnwell Rhett. In 1867, Dawson and a partner purchased the struggling *Charleston News*. They added the faltering *Courier* in 1873 and created the *News and Courier*. Though based in Charleston’s historic district, the “old lady of Broad Street” grew statewide under Dawson’s able leadership. In 1880, the editor created a bureau in the state capital of Columbia and staffed it with an ambitious young journalist named Narciso Gener Gonzalez. N.G., as he was called, was the son of an aristocratic woman from the Lowcountry who had surprised her family by marrying a

¹⁹² Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*.

dashing Cuban ex-patriot who had fled his homeland after joining a failed revolt against Spanish control.

During his first run for governor, in 1888, Tillman claimed Dawson and *News and Courier* wielded too much power in South Carolina. A small “ring” of rich planters rule that state, Tillman said, “and that ring is on Dawson’s little finger.” The *News and Courier* responded in kind, calling Tillman’s supporters “red necks” who “carry pistols in their pockets, expectorate on the floor, have no toothbrushes, and comb their hair with their fingers.” Tillman lost that battle, and Dawson died one year later, but their clash during that 1888 campaign set the tone for the long conflict to come between the state’s aristocratic elites and working-class farmers and mill workers.

In 1890, Tillman defeated Hampton’s candidate, Alexander Haskell, and claimed the Democratic Party nomination, ending the Bourbon reign in the statehouse.¹⁹³ Infuriated by Tillman’s victory, Narciso Gonzales decided the *News and Courier* needed more help in the battle against the reformers. He and one of his brothers, Ambrose, raised \$30,000 to launch a new daily in Columbia. On February 18, 1891, *The State* rolled off the press and joined the battle against what the paper described as “Tillmanism.” For the next thirteen years, N.G. hammered away at Tillman’s leadership. During that time, Tillman did little to carry out his proposed economic reforms on behalf of the state’s small farmers, but he did oversee the rise of Jim Crow laws enforcing racial segregation and limiting the African American vote.¹⁹⁴ Of more concern to *The State*, Tillman

¹⁹³ Lewis Pinckney Jones, *Stormy Petrel: N.G. Gonzalez and His State* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), 66-75.

¹⁹⁴ Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman*, 198-244.

seemed to excuse the violence of white mobs that lynched blacks in South Carolina.¹⁹⁵ Affiliated with Bourbon conservatism, *The State* supported white supremacy, but despised “lawlessness” and disliked the nasty race baiting of the Tillman and Blease campaigns. For Bourbon conservatives, it was clear that blacks were inferior and thus it was unnecessary and uncivilized to treat them as a serious threat to white rule. It was this paternalistic view of African Americans in the South would eventually come to dominate white newspaper opinion in the state during the first half of the twentieth century.

Narciso Gonzales’ long struggle with “Tillmanism” came to a violent end in January 1903. The previous year, N.G. had delivered a daily barrage of attacks on Tillman’s nephew James, who was running for governor that year. *The State* described Jim Tillman as a liar and a gambler who was “the worst and most indefensible man who ever sought the Democratic nomination.” Jim Tillman finished fourth in the Democratic primary. Five months later, on January 15, 1903, Gonzales left his office one evening and walked down Main Street, where he crossed paths with Jim Tillman, Cole Blease and two other men. Tillman pulled out a handgun, fired a shot into Gonzales, and calmly turned himself in to nearby police officer. The injured editor struggled to return to his office, where he dictated an account of the shooting. Four days later, he died in a Columbia hospital. Six months after that, a jury in nearby Lexington County acquitted Jim Tillman on murder charges on grounds of self-defense. Some jury members would call the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, *Ben Tillman*, 156-166.

shooting justifiable revenge, given the nature of the newspaper's accusations against Tillman.¹⁹⁶

The State would survive and prosper after its editor's death, eventually surpassing the *News and Courier* as South Carolina's largest newspaper. By the 1940s, the two newspapers – along with the *Greenville News* in the northern Upstate region – were the dominant news media voices in the state, and all three espoused the distinctly conservative and paternalistic worldview that could be traced back to the Bourbons. Tillman and Blease had once commanded newspapers that did battle with conservative editors at *The State* and the *News and Courier*.¹⁹⁷ Gonzales had derided these political organs as “organettes” that were not built to last, and he was right.¹⁹⁸ By the beginning of the Depression, economic woes had weeded out many weaker papers across the state. Fewer newspapers meant fewer editorial voices, and by the 1940s, the overwhelming majority of those that remained carried on the conservative tradition established by Dawson, Gonzales, and the Bourbon conservatives late in the nineteenth century.

The strongest of these editorial voices belonged to William Watts Ball, the cranky editor of the Charleston *News and Courier*. In his 70s and nearing the end of a brilliant career, Ball had served as an editor at all three of the state's largest newspapers. He had helped restore *The State*'s reputation after Gonzalez' assassination. As editor from 1913 to 1923, Ball had taken the lead in the fight against Blease, who had been elected governor in 1910 and 1912 and had his eye on the US Senate. He detested the way Blease

¹⁹⁶ Jones, *Stormy Petral*, 298-307; Samuel L. Latimer, Jr., *The Story of the State and the Gonzales Brothers* (Columbia, S.C.: The State-Record Company, 1970), 53-65.

¹⁹⁷ These included the *Charleston World*, the *Barnwell People*, the *Columbia Register* and many others that emerged briefly and folded between 1890 and 1930.

¹⁹⁸ Jones, *Stormy Petral*, 288.

stoked class conflict by pushing while mill workers to challenge mill owners over wages and work conditions. His daily attacks have been credited with helping defeat Blease's Senate bid in 1916.¹⁹⁹

In 1923, Ball left *The State* to become dean of the new journalism school at the University of South Carolina. But the career change did not stick. After four years in academia, Ball longed to return to daily journalism and get back into the political fray. "I long for a 'scrap,'" he wrote to a friend. "I'm not content without a fight on my hands." He got his chance when an old colleague offered him the editorship of the *News and Courier*.²⁰⁰ It was a good fit from the start. Ball had worked in Charleston before as editor of the competing *Evening Post*, and he was eager to return. He particularly liked the city's rich aristocratic heritage. It is "one of the few communities retaining civilization," Ball said.²⁰¹ His biographer, John D. Stark, described Ball's return to Charleston as an "inevitable natural alliance" that had at last been consummated.²⁰²

An acerbic writer, Ball was perhaps even more of a Bourbon conservative than Dawson or Gonzales ever had been. Born in Laurens, South Carolina, in 1868, Ball grew up watching his father battle the forces of Reconstruction following the Civil War. With the protection of federal troops, black residents used their newly acquired right to vote and turned out the white aristocrats like his father who had run all political affairs in Laurens County. As a young boy, Ball cheered Hampton's so-called "red shirt" campaign

¹⁹⁹ Stark, *Damned Upcountryman*, 70-73.

²⁰⁰ Ibid; Patricia McNeely. *Fighting Words: The History of the Media in South Carolina*. (South Carolina Press Association.1998).

²⁰¹ William Watts Ball. *The Editor and the Republic: The Papers and Addresses of William Watts Ball*. Edited by Anthony Harrigan. (University of North Carolina Press, 1954).

²⁰² Stark. *Damned Upcountryman*, 121-122.

of 1876.²⁰³ Those childhood experiences helped forge a life-long commitment to white supremacy and states' rights. As a true Bourbon conservative, however, Ball's political views were shaped by two other deeply held convictions: his belief in the wisdom of the aristocracy and his deep distrust of democracy. He liked to say that he "was a Democrat, but not a democrat" – he supported the party, but opposed universal suffrage.²⁰⁴

Ball embraced this brand of conservatism as a young boy and remained faithful to it throughout his long career. For him, race was less important than class. He railed against the populist politics of Tillman and Blease who rallied poor, working-class white voters to win elections in South Carolina. He deplored their appeal for government aid, which he equated with moral weakness. Ball championed individualism, self-reliance, and personal resourcefulness; he believed the worthy would find their way to the top. His 1932 book, *The State That Forgot: South Carolina's Surrender to Democracy*, was a paean to the aristocratic rule of the Old South, when educated landowners ran society and the poor – and black – seemed to know their "place."²⁰⁵

Ball's virulent anti-government views gained national attention in the 1930s when he challenged Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies. They would lead to a "collectivist state" and "mob" rule. And the "mob disposition," he wrote, "is now as always to fill guts with food and drink (and) avoid exertion and responsibility." A life-long Democrat who despised the Republican Party of Lincoln and Reconstruction, Ball nonetheless

²⁰³ Stark. *Damned Upcountryman*, 14-17.

²⁰⁴ Charles J. Holden. *In The Great Maelstrom: Conservatives in Post-Civil War South Carolina* (University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 94; Stark, *Damned Upcountryman*, 5.

²⁰⁵ W.W. Ball. *The State That Forgot: South Carolina's Surrender to Democracy* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1932).

declared after Roosevelt's 1936 re-election, when Democrats actively sought black voters in the North, "I have no party."²⁰⁶ He dreamed of a Southern revolt, but it would be another dozen years before his rebellion arrived.

Ball's arrival at the *News and Courier* came in the nick of time. The national prosperity of the Roaring 20s had not reached South Carolina, and the newspaper had suffered a steep economic decline.²⁰⁷ In 1925, editor Frank Lathan had won a Pulitzer Prize for his editorial decrying the South's lack of influence on national politics.²⁰⁸ But by 1927 the "Old Lady of Broad Street" had slipped dramatically. Once the state's second-largest paper, the *News and Courier* now trailed even its upstart local competitor, the *Evening Post*, in daily circulation. By the 1940s, however, Ball's provocative editorial voice had helped to revive the paper and support its motto as "South Carolina's most outspoken newspaper." His unsigned opinion pieces, often biting, acerbic and sarcastic, ran daily on the editorial page and occasionally on the front page. They were influential – "read, marked, learned and inwardly digested," as one newspaper reported.²⁰⁹ Politicians scrambled to curry his favor.²¹⁰

Ball's former newspaper, *The State*, had promoted long-time newsroom employee Samuel L. Latimer to the top editor's job in late 1941 after the sudden death of McDavid Horton. Latimer maintained the paper's conservative editorial line, but without the passion or the bite that Ball delivered. An editorial in *The State* during the 1940s often

²⁰⁶ Holden. *In the Great Maelstrom*, 107.

²⁰⁷ Walter Edgar. *South Carolina: A History*. (University of South Carolina Press. 1998).

²⁰⁸ Lathan, Robert. "The Plight of the South," in *Pulitzer Prize Editorials. America's Best Writing 1917-2003*, eds., William David Sloan and Laird B. Anderson, 29.

²⁰⁹ Ball. *The Editor and the Republic*. From the Introduction by Anthony Harrigan, xiv.

²¹⁰ Stark. *Damned Upcountryman*; Holden. *In the Great Maelstrom*.

read like a bland summation of the facts rather than a full-throated expression of a deeply held point of view. For Ball, boring the readers was a cardinal sin, and he couldn't help tweaking his old employer at times. Without mentioning *The State* by name, Ball said if "opinions broke loose" on a certain capital city editorial page in South Carolina, "they would cause more sensation among readers than would a story of a man biting a dog."²¹¹

Perhaps Latimer's prose was designed to remain understated and non-controversial. *The State's* economic fortunes had benefited from the growth of the capital city, and The State Company had become highly profitable. After purchasing its afternoon competitor, *The Columbia Record*, The State Company gained a monopoly in the daily newspaper business in the capital city and began to look like the prosperous chains that would grow to dominate the industry in post-World War II years. Though not as conservative as *The State*, and certainly not as Bourbon as Ball's *News and Courier*, the *Record*, under editor George Buchanan, was nonetheless another predictably conservative editorial voice.

In 1947, a new and slightly different editorial voice began to challenge the conservative editorial pages in the state. In Florence, about 130 miles northwest of Charleston, James A. Rogers took over as editor of the *Morning News* in the summer of 1947. A tobacco market town in the heart of South Carolina's rural Pee Dee region, Florence had benefitted from the nation's post-war prosperity. Its population had reached 16,000 – a 40% increase since the start of the decade.²¹² In his introductory editorial, published June 3, 1947, Rogers noted the growth of the Pee Dee in the post-war years and

²¹¹ "Must Never Break Loose," *Charleston News and Courier*, November 25, 1949, 4A.

²¹² South Carolina State Legislative Manuel, 1948.

promised his *Morning News* would be “in the vanguard of this progress.”²¹³ Rogers also used that first editorial to establish his political point of view – and to issue a gentle warning to his readers. He aimed “to publish a liberal, progressive newspaper” that supported “forward strides throughout the Pee Dee,” he wrote. In doing so, “...we shall not hesitate to voice opinions which may be contrary to those held by some or even many of our readers. That is the traditional spirit of the press, and to that tradition this editorship shall scrupulously cling.”²¹⁴

In his opening editorial, Rogers revealed the two forces that would shape his political views during the turbulent years ahead: a deep connection to his community – Florence and the surrounding farmlands – and a commitment to building a progressive and just society. Born in 1905 in the tiny town of Blenheim, South Carolina, the son of a Baptist minister, Rogers fell in love with the rural Pee Dee. Fascinated by farm life, he earned the nickname the “agricultural evangelist” during his years as editor. “Rogers was as much a product of the rural South, particularly the Pee Dee, as cotton,” journalist and academic Don Stewart wrote in his obituary.²¹⁵ Like his father, Rogers attended seminary and served as a “country preacher” at churches across the Pee Dee. He wrote a weekly inspirational column, “Hearts Aglow,” for the *Morning News* before joining the paper full time. In his first editorial, the new editor summed up his worldview with a quote from John W. Davis, the Democratic Party’s failed presidential nominee of 1924: “He deserves

²¹³ James A. Rogers. “A Personal Word.” *Florence Morning News*. June 3, 1947, 4.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Don Stewart. “A Progressive, Courageous Man.” *Florence Morning News*. Sept. 30, 1990.

to be called progressive who cannot see a wrong persist without an effort to redress it, or a right denied without an effort to protect it.”²¹⁶

Where Ball and the conservative editors tended to look back in anger, Rogers looked ahead with cautious optimism. He had grown up in a different South than Ball. Reconstruction had ended more than two decades before his birth. The new century ushered in the Progressive movement in American politics, which reached its peak with the election of Woodrow Wilson in 1912. The movement spawned a growing band of southern liberals – many of them newspaper editors – who emerged as a significant minority voice in the region pressing for economic, educational, and social reforms. They included George Fort Milton of the *Chattanooga News*; Harry Ashmore, a South Carolinian who won a Pulitzer Prize as editor of the *Arkansas Gazette*; Mark Etheridge of *The Macon Telegraph* and later *The Courier-Journal* of Louisville; Viginus Dabney of the *Richmond Times Dispatch*; and, most prominently, Ralph McGill of *The Atlanta Constitution* and Hodding Carter, Jr. of Greenville, Mississippi’s *Delta Democrat-Times*. These southern liberals embraced industrial development, more spending on education, and improved opportunities for African Americans. They envisioned a prosperous South with good government services and a diversified economy that provided a better life for whites and blacks.²¹⁷

Rogers counted himself proudly in this southern liberal tradition. He emphasized economic progress and improved education, and he frequently quoted McGill to support

²¹⁶ A congressman from West Virginia who also served in the Wilson administration, Davis lost the 1924 election decisively to Republican Calvin Coolidge.

²¹⁷ John T. Kneebone. *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944*. (The University of North Carolina Press. 1985), 4.

his editorial point of view.²¹⁸ As a southern liberal, however, it should be no surprise that Rogers' introductory editorial failed to mention race. By 1947, race had become what one historian called "the underbelly of Southern liberalism."²¹⁹ Like their northern counterparts, Southern liberals pressed for reforms on a myriad of issues in the first half of the twentieth Century, but their liberalism stopped short on the question of racial integration. At that time, southern liberals like McGill believed in the necessity of social segregation; they wanted to reform Jim Crow laws, not abandon them. They fought on behalf of blacks in search of better housing, educational facilities, and job prospects. They argued white society should at least attempt to deliver on its promise of "separate but equal." But integration, they said, would lead to "violence and bloodshed" – especially if forced on the South by federal intervention.²²⁰

In the 1920s and 30s, black leaders embraced southern liberals as their allies. By the 40s, as African Americans grew more assertive politically, the relationship had changed. This was especially true in South Carolina, where McCray and his NAACP colleagues were committed to the fight for full citizenship and equality.²²¹ This new aggressiveness angered and confused liberals across the South. Mark Etheridge criticized black leaders "who demand 'all or nothing'" and "play into the hands of white demagogues." No power in the world, he warned, "could now force the Southern white

²¹⁸ From the author's review of *Florence Morning News* editorials, 1947-1948.

²¹⁹ David W. Southern. "Beyond Jim Crow Liberalism: Judge Waring's Fight Against Segregation in South Carolina, 1942-52," *Journal of Negro History*, 66, 3, 1981: 209-227.

²²⁰ Leonard Ray Teel. *Ralph Emerson McGill: Voices of the Southern Conscience*. (University of Tennessee Press. 2001); Hodding Carter. *Southern Legacy*. (Louisiana State University Press. 1950); Kneebone. *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race*; Morton Sosna. *In Search of the Silent South* (Columbia University. 1977).

²²¹ Patricia Sullivan. *Days of Hope*. (University of North Carolina Press. 1995), 145-150.

people to the abandonment of social segregation.”²²² Southern liberals wanted to go slow on race. But events would not cooperate.

The first undeniable evidence that African Americans had embraced protest politics in South Carolina came in the fall of 1946, when 861 black and white delegates from around the country gathered in Columbia to plan their ongoing campaign for African American rights. Organized by the Southern Negro Youth Conference, a branch of the National Negro Conference, the delegates met in Township Auditorium, the capitol city’s largest public meeting hall and performance space. Posters of black Reconstruction-era leaders lined the auditorium’s walls as the delegates heard from such prominent African Americans figures as Paul Robeson and W.E.B Du Bois. In his fiery keynote speech, Du Bois told his young audience to remain in the South and fight for their democratic rights. “Behold the beautiful land,” he said of the South. It would be an act of cowardice to surrender it to the “thugs and lynchers ... who choke its soul and steal its resources.” To rally support and win allies, Du Bois said, the movement needed “blatant, pitiless publicity” of white acts of injustice and brutality.²²³ Since Du Bois launched *The Crisis* in 1910, the black press had been working to draw attention to white atrocities in the Jim Crow South. McCray’s newspaper had joined that effort in South Carolina. The *Lighthouse and Informer* used its page to criticize white oppression to rally local support, but McCray also shared his coverage with the *Chicago Defender*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and the *Baltimore Afro-American* in an effort to influence opinion in the larger, national civil sphere as well.

²²² Kneebone. *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race*, 198.

²²³ For more on the SNYC meeting in Columbia, see: Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1962*; Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 213.

The city of Columbia had allowed the SNYC to rent Township Auditorium for its convention without complaint, and the white press paid no attention during the first two days of the gathering. The SNYC passed resolutions supporting federal anti-poll tax and anti-lynching laws, called for the creation of a permanent Federal Employment Practices Commission, and praised the AFL and CIO, saying their labor organizing drives had made “distinct contributions to the South.” Yet when the group criticized US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes, a South Carolina native, the white newspapers took notice. Byrnes had just returned from peace talks in Paris where he had criticized Soviet efforts to prevent free elections in Bulgaria and other eastern European nations. Du Bois and the SNYC pointed out the hypocrisy of Byrnes claiming to protect democracy abroad while helping deny it to African Americans at home.

When Gov. Ransome J. Williams denounced the SNYC attacks on Byrnes, the *Columbia Record* ran his comments on the front page. Williams called it regrettable that “Communistic elements came boldly and brazenly” into South Carolina’s capital city to undermine the secretary of state. By linking the event to communism, Williams had resumed the “red scare” tactics that southern whites had used to taint supporters of civil rights since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. In an editorial, however, the *Record* downplayed the communist connection. Yet its arguments exemplified the white press’s dismissive and paternalistic approach to black activism at the time. The paper agreed that the SNYC’s resolutions were “following closely the Communistic line,” but it blamed that on a few outside agitators and said most participants were not communists “or fellow travelers.” The newspaper suggested the SNYC had underestimated the white community in Columbia and its general support for African Americans. It noted that Du Bois had

also criticized Wade Hampton, even though “Hampton believed the Negro in South Carolina should be accorded the ballot.” The *Record* said the city granted the SNYC the right to use the auditorium because it believed “in free speech enough to allow the congress to attack South Carolina and South Carolinians without striking back.” The *Record* concluded by saying some SNYC leaders were disappointed that white South Carolinians had not given the group a propaganda victory by marching into the arena “hooded and robed” to break up the gathering.²²⁴

For black leaders in South Carolina, the SNYC meeting was significant, both as a public display of a new and seemingly fearless black assertiveness in the state, but also as a flashpoint in an internal debate over future strategy. McCray was skeptical of the SNYC, which had grown out of the Popular Front movement of the New Deal era and strived to build a biracial coalition of blacks and working-class whites in the South. As such, the SNYC did have ties to both socialist labor organizations and the Communist Party. To McCray, the SNYC appeared vulnerable to attacks just like the one the governor had made. His chief allies, Modjeska Simkins and Osceola McKaine, embraced coalition building with labor and leftist groups and believed the civil rights movement should stand up to white leaders who employed red scare arguments. McCray had always said the state movement should remain in local hands, although critics claimed he was merely protecting his own leadership position. The debate over the SNYC and civil rights strategy opened a rift between McCray and his allies that would never entirely heal. As US-Soviet relations worsened and Cold War rhetoric grew dominant, white southerners would increase efforts to tie civil rights to a Communist plot to destabilize American

²²⁴ “Governor Charges Negro Meeting was Communistic,” *Columbia Record*, October 21, 1946, 1A; “Columbia Dissapoints,” *Columbia Record*, October 22, 1946, 4A.

democracy. By 1949, the SYNC would be out of business, its leaders marginalized and facing legal harassment from the justice department and the House Un-American Activities Committee.²²⁵

Though angered by criticism of Byrnes, the white press depicted the comments as the work of “troublemakers” and “agitators” like Du Bois. Those could be controlled, they reasoned. Yet when a Democratic president decided to support civil rights legislation, white editorialists were forced on the defensive. They began to take black activism seriously, and their rhetoric grew harsher.

Harry Truman assumed the presidency when Roosevelt died in 1945, and he was not expected to win a full term on his own in the election of 1948. A resurgent Republican Party had retaken Congress in a landslide in 1946 – in part due to increased black support in the North²²⁶ -- and the GOP appeared ready to move back into the White House after a 16-year absence. Truman also faced a rebellion on his left. Henry Wallace, the man he had displaced as FDR’s vice presidential running mate in 1944, planned to launch a liberal third-party candidacy for the presidency. Against this backdrop, a young Truman aide named Clark Clifford laid out the president’s political strategy in a memo titled “The Politics of 1948,”²²⁷ To win, Clifford wrote, Truman must appeal to the emerging urban black vote in four prominent states – California, New York, Illinois, and Ohio. To attract those voters, Clifford advised the president to support a wide-ranging package of civil rights legislation. Clifford knew the plan would enrage Southern

²²⁵ Gellman, *Death Blow to Jim Crow*, 213-253; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 171-173.

²²⁶ Frederickson. *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 52.

²²⁷ Clifford wrote the memo, but he has attributed some of its analysis to longtime Roosevelt aide James Rowe. See, Zachary Karabell. *The Last Campaign – How Harry Truman Won the 1948 Election*. (Alfred A. Knopf. 2000).

Democrats, but he thought the “solid South” would stick with the party in the end. “As always, the South can be considered safely Democratic, and in forming national policy can be safely ignored,” Clifford wrote.²²⁸

White southerners were already on edge. They had been rattled by two developments in 1947. In October, the President’s Commission on Civil Rights released a report, “To Secure These Rights,” that called for an end to discrimination in employment and voting across the South. Truman created the commission partly in response to the string of violent acts against returning black servicemen in the South. One of the worst occurred in Batesburg, South Carolina. A white bus driver, with the help two police officers, beat a black soldier named Isaac Woodard after a dispute on the bus. Woodard was blinded by the attack. Woodard’s story – as well a moving picture of the blinded soldier – received widespread attention in the northern press, and northern liberals stepped up their pressure on Truman to take action.²²⁹ After the commission released its report, southern Democrats expressed alarm and warned Truman not to embrace the report’s recommendations.²³⁰

In South Carolina, meantime, white Democrats were more concerned about a sharply worded ruling delivered by one of their own. In July, US District Judge J. Waites Waring, a member of one of Charleston’s aristocratic families, had sided with the NAACP and rejected the state Democratic Party’s whites-only primary system.²³¹ Like the rest of the Deep South, South Carolina was so overwhelmingly Democratic that it was

²²⁸ Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson. *Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond*. (Public Affairs. 2005).

²²⁹ Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 219; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 54-56.

²³⁰ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 67-73.

²³¹ Southern, “Beyond Jim Crow Liberalism.”

virtually a one-party state; victory in the party's primary assured a candidate of winning the office. The state party argued it was a private association and not part of the state's "statutory process of election" – thus blacks had no "constitutional right to vote in such primary." The NAACP's young lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, helped convince Waring otherwise. "It is time for South Carolina to rejoin the Union," the judge wrote in his decision. "Racial discrimination cannot exist in the machinery that selects offices and lawmakers."²³²

The State offered no editorial opinion on Waring's landmark ruling, saying it would rather wait until all appeals were concluded. The *Columbia Record* said Waring's ruling "was not surprising," given the Supreme Court's earlier ruling knocking down the all-white primary in *Smith v. Allwright*, but it encouraged state lawmakers to draft new measures to "control how the ballot is exercised here."²³³

The ruling angered Ball, and he offered a more forceful response. Ball proposed that white Democrats "abandon completely the name of the Democratic Party" and create "an exclusive white man's political club under a new title."²³⁴ Ball turned the judge's ruling into another exhibit in his case for a white southern revolt.

For the liberal Rogers, just one month on the job, Waring's order offered an early opportunity to deliver on the promise he made in that first editorial: he challenged his community. "The *Florence Morning News* does not share the alarm felt by many South Carolinians at this new development," he wrote on July 13, 1947. "On the contrary, we

²³² *Elmore v. Rice*, 72 F. Supp. 516, 528.

²³³ "Judge Waring's Decision," *Columbia Record*, July 13, 1947, 4.

²³⁴ "Abandon the Party," *The News and Courier*, July 13, 1947, 4.

believe the federal decision was a sober, thoughtful approach to a vexing problem and the opinion handed down was a fair statement of facts, of democracy and of morals.” His conclusion was even stronger:

“... The *Florence Morning News* believes South Carolina has stayed out of the union long enough; that the time has come to make realistic decisions, to cease nurturing political prejudices born out of the distant past, to be able to practice in our own backyard the same principles of justice and democracy we claim are necessities in other parts of the world.”²³⁵

Rogers was not far outside the mainstream of South Carolina’s white press. A handful of editors accepted the inevitability of Waring’s ruling,²³⁶ but Rogers offered the strongest endorsement, and he knew his editorial ruined a good many breakfasts across the Pee Dee region that Sunday morning.²³⁷ To ease some of those fears, Rogers acknowledged the paper’s position was “not a popular one,” and he reassured readers that he believed support for black voting rights would not significantly weaken white political rule. “There is no reason to suppose that the average Negro will be more interested in politics than the average white person,” he wrote, concluding that blacks would be unlikely to vote in “blocs” to overpower whites politically.²³⁸ With his first major editorial on race, Rogers displayed the pattern he would follow throughout the difficult

²³⁵ “Judge Waring’s Ruling.” *Florence Morning News*. July 13, 1947, 4.

²³⁶ Southern, “Beyond Jim Crow Liberalism.”

²³⁷ Stewart, “A Progressive, Courageous Man.”

²³⁸ “Judge Waring’s Ruling.”

year head: He sought to lead his community to higher ground, but without marching too far ahead of it.

Truman dropped his civil rights bombshell on February 2, 1948. The president proposed legislation that would abolish the poll tax²³⁹, end discrimination in interstate transportation, make lynching a federal crime,²⁴⁰ and create a permanent Federal Employment Practices Commission. The white South reacted virulently. In Jackson, Mississippi, *The Clarion Ledger* set the tone by denouncing the “cold-blooded and treacherous offer by the national leaders to swap destruction of the South for the votes ... of Negroes who may hold the balance of power in a few states.”²⁴¹

Truman’s push for civil rights would eventually lead to a southern revolt at the Democratic Convention in July. Surprisingly, one of the key players in the drama turned out to be South Carolina’s young governor, J. Strom Thurmond. Elected in 1946, Thurmond had campaigned as a New Deal progressive eager to bring economic development to South Carolina. He had avoided blatant appeals to racism and had even argued in favor of more spending on higher education for blacks in the state.²⁴² Yet over the next six months, Thurmond would step into a leadership role in the fight for states’ rights and white supremacy in the South. In July of 1948, he would bolt from the Democratic Party and run for president on the States’ Rights Party ticket. To Ball,

²³⁹ A fee on voter registration widely used in the South to deter blacks from registering.

²⁴⁰ A long-time goal of the NAACP.

²⁴¹ Susan Weill, “Mississippi’s Daily Press in Three Crises,” in *The Press and Race: Mississippi Journalists Confront the Civil Rights Movement*, ed., David R. Davies. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi. 2001), 17-54.

²⁴² Bass and Thompson. *Strom*; Cohodas. *Strom Thurmond*.

Thurmond would become a hero, a defender “of the South against its liberal enemies.”²⁴³ To Rogers, the young governor was a great disappointment. His tone grew bitter as he watched Thurmond evolve from New Deal progressive to become one of the “hot heads” and “headline hunters” willing to play on racial fears in search of votes.²⁴⁴

The state Democratic Party’s response to Judge Waring’s ruling angered Rogers as well. With primaries approaching in August, the party faced the prospect of blacks voting in large numbers in Democratic primaries for the first time since Reconstruction. Stunned by the judge’s ruling and by Truman’s proposals, the state party convened in Columbia in May 1948 and mapped out its response. With Thurmond taking command, the convention confronted Truman first. The party ordered its national convention delegates to support Thurmond as a favorite son candidate and to avoid voting for Truman or any other candidate who supported the civil rights program. To combat Judge Waring’s ruling and preserve white primaries, the party adopted a controversial oath of allegiance. To vote in a primary, Democrats would be required to pledge their support for segregation, their commitment to “the principles of states’ rights,” and their opposition to the proposed Fair Employment Practices Committee. Rogers mocked the oath as “contrary to every principle of democracy,” and he ridiculed the party’s decision to debate the oath behind closed doors in executive session. “Does it mean they are little men without the courage to grapple intelligently with a real problem?” he asked.²⁴⁵

Ball encouraged the party’s efforts to fight the judge’s ruling. And he suggested a strategy that fit nicely with his belief in aristocratic rule. Abandon the primaries, he said,

²⁴³ “Thurmond for President.” *The News and Courier*. July 19, 1948, 1.

²⁴⁴ “Headline Hunters.” *Florence Morning News*. July 13, 1948, 4.

²⁴⁵ “No Precedent.” *Florence Morning News*. July 15, 1948, 4.

and replace them with the nominating convention. Allow Democratic Party leaders to select the party's candidates. "Why have primaries?" Ball wrote. "No one, white or colored, appears capable of the conception that primaries are not sacred and indispensable devices for the nomination of public offices." Under the convention system, white leaders would retain control over the party. They could even let in a few blacks, but only the right kind. "The negroes cooperating with white leaders in conventions would not be tools of the National Society for the Advancement of the Colored People," he wrote.

Ball clearly meant the NAACP, which he referred to often in his editorials, but rarely by its correct title.²⁴⁶ He claimed the organization and its leader, Walter White, would seize political power through "bloc voting." Ball said the *The News and Courier* is "not condemning them" for voting as a group because, in his view, "their first, their absorbing aim is not to elect Democrats or Republicans. It is to gain power for negroes."²⁴⁷ Perhaps Ball was "not condemning them," but he certainly believes whites should be afraid of potential black political power. White politicians would be forced to court the black vote, he argued -- wasn't that what Truman was doing this year?

To accommodate the new medium of television, both national parties held their conventions in Philadelphia in 1948.²⁴⁸ The Republicans gathered in a festive mood in late June and nominated a strong presidential ticket: New York Gov. Thomas Dewey,

²⁴⁶ A review of more than 70 of Ball's editorials by the author revealed only one correct use of the NAACP title. Ball's editorial page also printed "Negroes" in lower case.

²⁴⁷ "Peril – How to Escape It." *The News and Courier*, July 7, 1948, 4. (In 1948, Ball's editorial page at *The News and Courier* never capitalized Negroes; the *Florence Morning News* did)

²⁴⁸ Conway. "Before the Bloggers: The Upstart New Technology of Television at the 1948 Political Conventions."

seeking to avenge his loss to Roosevelt four years earlier, and California Gov. Earl Warren.²⁴⁹ The fractured Democrats arrived in the city two weeks later with a sense of doom in the air. Wallace had already launched his third party on the left. Truman's civil rights push had angered the conservative southerners. And northern liberals led by a young mayor named Hubert H. Humphrey figured to exacerbate the rift by pushing for an even stronger civil rights plank in the party platform. The question before white southern Democrats was stark: should they desert the party of their fathers and grandfathers – or should they stay and fight from within?

Ball knew what he wanted – and he argued his case forcefully throughout the month. Southern Democrats had been faithful to the Democratic Party “because it did not appeal to the negro voters,” he wrote on July 2. “The negro question was the basic, overwhelming cause ... that held the Southern states in the national Democratic Party. That cause no longer exists. It has disappeared. ... What is here said is fact: The sole reason that created and maintained the South solid is gone.”²⁵⁰

Ball laced his editorials with anti-government rhetoric, his disdain for what he called “the office holding industry.” He claimed the state's incumbent senators, Olin Johnston and Burnett Maybank, secretly supported the national Democratic Party because “the boys can more easily hold their jobs by keeping the machine well greased.” He often claimed the Democrats were no different than the Republicans on civil rights, and that neither party “is interested in the Southern white man. He is the forgotten man of 1948.”

²⁴⁹ Warren would play a much larger role in the civil rights struggle six years later. As chief justice of the Supreme Court, he would deliver the opinion overturning school segregation in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*.

²⁵⁰ W.W. Ball. “Differences Wiped Out,” *The News and Courier*, July 2, 1948, 4.

Rogers also opposed Truman's civil rights package. Like McGill and other southern liberals, Rogers argued against federal coercion, believing it would set back race relations in the region. He also thought the issue would drive white southerners to break with the national Democrats. "While political party lines are deep-seated in the South, it is, nevertheless, true that racial lines are more deeply rooted," the *Morning News* said shortly after Truman's February speech. But Rogers delivered a mixed message on party loyalty. The man who hired him, publisher John G. O'Dowd, was a committed Democratic Party member in 1948.²⁵¹ And as the July convention drew closer, Rogers urged state Democrats to stay in the party. But he did so without much conviction. And while he never encouraged readers to vote for Dewey, he joined other southern liberals like McGill in repeatedly bemoaning the lack of a two-party system in the South. "The need for two strong political parties in South Carolina was never so apparent as it is now," he wrote on July 16.²⁵² The same day he published an editorial from *The Savannah Morning News*, "as Southern a newspaper as the South produces," that actually endorsed the GOP ticket: "The challenge to Southerners this year is crystal clear. It is to put behind them the insufferable fetish that they must vote the Democratic ticket because they have always done so, and because their fathers and grandfathers voted that way."²⁵³

As the national convention got under way, Thurmond's role in the southern rebellion increased. The South's leading politicians – senators like Richard Russell of Georgia and Harry Byrd of Virginia – had established seniority in Congress that could be jeopardized if they walked away from the party. Some also feared a rabid defense of

²⁵¹ Ronald K. Wray. "The Anti Pro-Segregationist: Jack K. O'Dowd and the Desegregation Controversy. (University of South Carolina Honors Thesis. 1988.)

²⁵² "Never so Apparent." *Florence Morning News*. July 16, 4.

²⁵³ "Voice from Georgia." *Florence Morning News*. July 16, 4.

racial segregation could deter investment and stall economic development in the South. They opposed Truman's civil rights push, but treaded more cautiously. That opened the door for second-tier politicians like Thurmond, and the governor rushed through it. The first night of the convention, he took the lead in urging a caucus of southern delegations to abandon the president. "We have been betrayed," he declared, "and the guilty should not go unpunished."²⁵⁴ That stirred Rogers to attack: "Frankly, we are becoming tired of little men like Thurmond and {Sen. Olin} Johnston beating their drums to rabble-rouse Southern sentiment... Ostensibly, their fight is against Truman. But in reality, it is all too apparent that their fight is for Thurmond and Johnston."²⁵⁵ Thurmond was expected to challenge Johnston in the 1950 Senate race, and Rogers believed both men pandered on the race issue to prepare for the political fight ahead. "There is one hope for South Carolina," he wrote. "That hope is this: that the mounting political battle between Johnston and Thurmond will result in each killing the other off politically."²⁵⁶

Rogers wrote forcefully about what he opposed that summer. But what did he support, what path forward did he propose? There, he was less specific, more cautious. He condemned the state Democratic Party for ignoring the courts. But he rarely returned to the ethical and moral argument he had used the previous July to support Judge Waring's order striking down whites-only primaries. Now he took a more pragmatic approach. He warned of the dangers of violating federal court orders and looked for ways to reach out to those who feared black political power. "It now appears certain that Negroes will be permitted to vote in the August primary," Rogers wrote July 10. "This

²⁵⁴ Cohodas. *Strom Thurmond*, 157.

²⁵⁵ "Headline Hunters," *Florence Morning News*, July 12, 1948, 4.

²⁵⁶ "Lone Hope," *Florence Morning News*. July 14, 1948, 4.

newspaper has always feared the problem created by an antagonistic attitude toward the court's decision." But the state party still had time to correct the problem and "eliminate the causes of friction on the racial issue." His solution: create intelligence and educational qualifications for South Carolina voters and apply them equally to both races. "We have frankly admitted, and do so again, that there are Negroes, many of them, who aren't mentally or emotionally prepared to exercise the ballot intelligently. By the same token, we have argued that there are whites who are equally unqualified," he wrote.²⁵⁷ Again, Rogers leads his community by pressing for black suffrage, but stops short of the more radical idea of universal suffrage. Like other Southern liberals at the time, he proposes gradual change with an eye on attracting more whites to his point of view. Critics would mock this approach as "gradualism" and "Jim Crow liberalism."²⁵⁸ But Rogers appeared less concerned about ideology than the well being of his community. The editor believed he had pushed hard enough.

Rogers employed the same strategy in the debate over which state party delegation should be seated at the national convention. The state had three slates of delegates going to Philadelphia: the regular white Democrats led by Thurmond; the black Progressive Democrats, led by McCray; and a small group known as the True Democrats, which included several liberal whites angered by the proposed loyalty oath who joined with a handful of blacks to create a third slate. The Progressive Democrats had been battling the white Democratic Party since the early 1940s, when McCray launched the party in concert with the NAACP. In 1944, the Progressive Democrats sent their first

²⁵⁷ "Still Not Too Late" *Florence Morning News*, July 10, 1948, 4.

²⁵⁸ Barbara Barksdale Clowse. *Ralph McGill: A Biography* (Mercer University Press, 1998), 138.

delegation to the national convention in Chicago to challenge the party's voting rules. That fall, McCray's colleague, Osceola McKaine, ran an aggressive Senate campaign that mobilized African American political engagement across the state. It was the Progressive Democrats who worked hand-in-hand with Thurgood Marshall and the national NAACP on the legal battle that led to Judge Waring's 1947 ruling overturning the whites-only primary.²⁵⁹ Clearly, McCray's party represented the overwhelming majority of African Americans in South Carolina; they had worked assiduously within the legal and political systems to earn the right to join the political process. Yet Rogers ignored McCray's party. He argued "logic suggests" the True Democrats should be seated because they are the only ones "representing bi-racial support of Federal Court decisions."²⁶⁰ It is true that McCray's party started as the South Carolina Colored Democratic Party and initially accepted black members only. But McCray and others claimed that was a necessity "to protect against exploitation and persecution" in early 1940s South Carolina. By April 1944, the party had changed its name and exclusionary policy, and by 1948 the Progressive Democrats clearly embraced bi-racial politics.²⁶¹ With his editorial, Rogers sidestepped the moral and legal issues at the heart of the debate and appeared to search for a "moderate" position that allowed him to chastise the regular Democrats but avoid supporting the activist black organization. Again, he challenged his readers, but stopped short of direct confrontation.

²⁵⁹ Sullivan. *Days of Hope*, 145-150; Peter F. Lau. *Democracy Rising. South Carolina and the Fight for Black Equality Since 1865*. (University of Kentucky Press. 2006) 136-140.

²⁶⁰ "More Confusion," *Florence Morning News*, July 1, 1948, 4.

²⁶¹ Lau. *Democracy Rising*, 136-140.

Ball, meanwhile, made it clear where he stood. He called McCray's Progressive Democrats "a creature of the National Society for the Advancement of Colored People, a Northern organization of negroes. It is not a movement of South Carolina negroes."²⁶² He called for the white Democratic Party to reconvene and open its rolls to "every living organism ... that could make a letter X," and then "abandon the party to the Office Holding Industry and the Colored People."²⁶³ White South Carolinians should form their own private association and select general election candidates at a nominating convention. White people can "take over the reins of white man's government. They can give the state a fresh new leadership," he wrote, challenging this "new leadership" to confront federal tyranny. "How far will the federal courts go in their decisions? To what extent would white people submit to compulsion upon them exerted by federal authority to wipe out distinctions, to outlaw separation between and of the white and Negro races in South Carolina."²⁶⁴

In Philadelphia, the convention moved toward its dramatic conclusion. On the final day, Humphrey's strengthened civil rights plank passed narrowly 651 ½ to 582 ½, sending the hall into pandemonium. With Birmingham's Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, leading the way, members of the Alabama delegation shouted for recognition to announce their departure in protest. One reporter described Connor's roaring voice as sounding like "the devil's own loudspeaker."²⁶⁵ But convention chairman Sam Rayburn ignored their pleas and quickly adjourned the session. When the delegates reconvened that evening, Alabama's chairperson, Handy Ellis, told the

²⁶² "Escape from a Corrupt Orgy." *The News and Courier*, July 11, 1948, 4.

²⁶³ "Time to Abandon Party." *The News and Courier*, July 9, 1948, 4.

²⁶⁴ "Wipe Out Distinctions." *The News and Courier*, July 2, 1948, 4.

²⁶⁵ Frederickson. *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 130.

assembly that his delegation “could not participate” in a convention that could adopt such a strong civil rights plank. “Without hatred and without anger and without fear, but with disillusionment and disappointment . . . we bid you good bye.” The sweltering convention hall once again erupted with hoots and jeers as a dozen of Alabama’s delegates trudged down the center aisle and out of the building²⁶⁶, followed by the entire Mississippi delegation.²⁶⁷

Thurmond and the South Carolina delegates stayed in the hall and watched as Truman won the party’s presidential nomination on the first ballot. The next day, July 16, Judge Waring issued another blistering order. He rejected the state party’s final appeal and demanded the party open its enrollment books to blacks immediately. One day later, July 17, a group of rebellious Southern Democrats led by Gov. Fielding Wright of Mississippi and former Gov. Frank Dixon of Alabama convened in Birmingham. Initially, Thurmond had said he would not attend, a decision Rogers grudgingly applauded – “Let Governor Thurmond try now as hard to be a good governor as he has tried to plummet himself into the national spotlight.”²⁶⁸

The editor would quickly be disappointed. Thurmond changed his mind and on the morning of the rebel convention he rearranged his schedule to include a visit to Birmingham. By that evening, he had accepted the presidential nomination of the States’ Rights Democratic Party – later nicknamed the Dixiecrats by a *Charlotte News* headline

²⁶⁶ Future Alabama governor and presidential candidate George C. Wallace, a protégé of populist Gov. Jim Folsom, was one of the delegates who did not walk out of the convention.

²⁶⁷ Frederickson. *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 130. Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond*, 167. Bass and Thompson, *Strom*, 116.

²⁶⁸ “The Greater Service,” *Florence Morning News*, July 17, 1948, 4.

writer.²⁶⁹ Decades later, Thurmond would claim he cared more about the constitutional question of states' rights than about race. But his acceptance speech suggested otherwise: "I want to tell you that the progress of the Negro race has not been due to these so-called emancipators but to the kindness of the good Southern people ... I want to tell you that there's not enough troops in the army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the Negro race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes and into our churches."²⁷⁰

Rogers dismissed the States' Rights convention, calling it "the Birmingham circus" and declaring its leaders "men of small sectional stature whose political ambitions far exceed either their judgment or their ability."²⁷¹ The turn of events thrilled Ball, however. They gave him the "rebellion" that he so dearly wanted. He celebrated with a front-page editorial: "Thurmond for President." The Democrats and Republicans "are making a play for negro votes, the former in the belief they have the white Southerners in the bag and the latter in the knowledge that they have no chance to carry the South anyway," Ball said. "The solid South now can demonstrate that it is not in the bag, that it has a mind and a will of its own, and that it offers a tempting bloc of electoral votes for a candidate who will make an honest bid for them." Ball contended the Dixiecrats could carry all eleven states of the old Confederacy and perhaps deny victory to either Truman or Dewey, forcing the election into the House of Representatives. "In the electoral college lies the only chance to save the South for Southerners," he wrote.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Bass and Thompson. *Strom*. 102.

²⁷⁰ Cohodas. *Strom Thurmond*. 177.

²⁷¹ "The Birmingham Circus." *Florence Morning News*, July 20, 1948, 4.

²⁷² "Thurmond for President." *The News and Courier*, July 19, 1948, 1.

Rogers decried the “hot head” and “self-aggrandizing” politician who acted out of anger, and he urged his state to think carefully before embracing the new ticket. “The Birmingham convention was called in the heat of wrath over Philadelphia. It was held amid an atmosphere of hot tempers and high emotionalism,” Rogers wrote. “For South Carolina to swallow hook, line and sinker without following first a calm, deliberate, wait-and-see policy would be a harum-scarum invitation to political disaster.”²⁷³ In the end, he suspected the Dixiecrats would carry South Carolina, but without “enthusiasm or unanimity.”²⁷⁴ It would be better for the state, however, if the political morass gave birth to a competitive Republican Party. Here he echoed his southern liberal counterparts who believed fervently in the need for a two-party system in the South:

“The *Florence Morning News* is unfettered, untied, unpledged to any person or party. Its sole interest is in ... encouraging good government by whatever party is in power. It has a wholesome faith in the Democratic Party but it would like to see in the South a strong Republican Party as well. It believes this would provide a system of ‘checks and balances’ which would work to more efficient, more progressive government.”²⁷⁵

Once again, Rogers leavened his argument with caution. He supported a strong GOP in the South, but failed to take the bold step of actually endorsing that year’s Republican ticket.

²⁷³ “There is Danger in Haste,” *Florence Morning News*, July 24, 1948, 4.

²⁷⁴ “S.C. and the Dixiecrats,” *Florence Morning News*, July 28, 1948, 4.

²⁷⁵ “Unfettered, Untied,” *Florence Morning News*, July 24, 1948, 4.

Where Rogers was cautious, Ball was provocative. He chastised the state's "silent" political leaders for failing to support the Dixiecrats more aggressively. "What has happened to the upsurge of enthusiasm that should be greeting the nomination of Thurmond for president?" he asked. "The governor ... has been a consistent, an able and eloquent supporter of the Southern cause."²⁷⁶ At the same time, he delivered a warning to white politicians tempted to court black votes in the coming primaries. "Which of the candidates ... is soliciting the votes of the newly admitted party members of the Negro race? ... If they welcome the support of the colored Democrats, the white Democrats should know it."²⁷⁷ Ball hammered away at Truman and the national Democrats as the enemies of white southerners and warned that federal courts would eventually force "amalgamation" of the races in South Carolina. He spoke the language of white supremacy, but claimed his cause was far larger than that. "Again *The News and Courier* declares that it is not concerned about 'white supremacy.' It is the advocate of supremacy of the worthy."²⁷⁸ Most of all, Ball advocated rebellion – against the Democratic Party, the federal courts, the New Deal, democracy itself – against all the forces threatening to overwhelm his antiquated vision of South Carolina. "Talk of 'White Supremacy' is filling the minds of some people," he wrote. "It doesn't worry us, but we ARE for Rebel Supremacy, and we've got it! We've got it!"

The Dixiecrats won South Carolina and three other Deep South states that November, but they failed to unify the larger South and they finished a distant third in the presidential race. More important, they failed to stop Harry Truman's surprise re-election.

²⁷⁶ "The Silent 'Leaders.'" *The News and Courier*, July 23, 1948, 4.

²⁷⁷ "Who Solicits Negro Votes?" *The News and Courier*, July 23, 1948, 4.

²⁷⁸ "Supremacy of the Worthy." *The News and Courier*, July 13th, 1948, 4.

The results seemed to support Clark Clifford's analysis: black voters in the North managed to offset the revolt in the South.²⁷⁹ In that sense, political analysts considered Thurmond's Dixiecrat campaign an abject failure.²⁸⁰ Thurmond disagreed, of course. He argued the rebellion had helped the South declare its independence and prove it was "no longer in the bag" for the Democrats.

For William Watts Ball, who had fought so long for his southern revolt, the Dixiecrat campaign was a dream come true. Despite the electoral failure, he depicted it as a grand victory for the region. After the results were in, he summed up his feelings with three short words: "I am free."²⁸¹ Yet the Dixiecrat campaign – especially Thurmond's nomination acceptance speech – had damaged the segregationist cause in the national civil sphere. Through the use of such loaded language as "mongrelization," Thurmond's campaign appealed to crass white supremacy in a way that would have pleased Cole Blease and Ben Tillman. The Dixiecrat's rhetoric mimicked the shrill tribal cries of the revived Ku Klux Klan in the South, despite Thurmond's attempts to disassociate his campaign from that group. The tone and substance of his campaign had fallen outside the accepted rhetoric of American democracy and had helped encourage civil rights supporters in the North, while further isolating the white South. The Dixiecrat campaign may have rallied white southerners who were eager to embrace the Lost Cause and reunite the Confederacy, but it pained those who were more serious about preserving the southern way of life. One of those serious men would emerge from South Carolina in

²⁷⁹ Frederickson. *The Dixiecrat Revolt*; Cohodas. *Strom Thurmond*; Bass and Thompson. *Strom*.

²⁸⁰ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*; Cohodas. *Strom Thurmond*; Bass and Thompson. *Strom*.

²⁸¹ "The Election." *The News and Courier*, Nov. 4, 1948, 4.

the wake of the Dixiecrat debacle and deliver a new message designed to unite the South, but also to ease concerns and win empathetic allies in the North.

CHAPTER 5

JAMES F. BYRNES AND THE WHITE SOUTH'S NEW NARRATIVE

South Carolina's most respected political figure sat out the Dixiecrat campaign of 1948. James F. Byrnes had resigned as US secretary of state in 1947, and since then had been splitting time between a lucrative Washington law practice and his home in the rolling foothills near Spartanburg. Though a generation older than Strom Thurmond, Byrnes was friendly with the young governor from Edgefield, and they appeared to share a similar worldview. In 1946, Thurmond had avoided extreme race baiting in the governor's race and had argued that economic progress eventually would end racial tensions in the South. Like Byrnes, Thurmond supported the basic thrust of the early New Deal reforms but chafed at what he considered its more liberal extremes later in FDR's presidency. Neither doubted the correctness or morality of segregation. But both men detested mob violence and believed the presence of an active Ku Klux Klan in South Carolina would scare off business investment and prevent the state from participating in the postwar economic expansion.²⁸²

Yet when Thurmond jumped at the opportunity to lead the Dixiecrat revolt against Truman and the national Democratic Party, Byrnes refused to get on board. Ever the canny politician, Byrnes knew better than to oppose the Dixiecrat uprising publicly

²⁸² Robertson, *Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes*, 492-500; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 118-150; Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America*, 34-84.

in South Carolina. Instead, he went into hiding. He spent the last six months of 1948 avoiding reporters' calls and "sincerely wishing to stay out of politics."²⁸³

Byrnes' statement was slightly disingenuous. He wanted to stay out of the 1948 presidential campaign, but he had every intention of getting back into politics. Like the Dixiecrats, Byrnes despised Truman's push for civil rights reform as well as the president's "Fair Deal" economic agenda. But Byrnes had told friends he doubted a third party effort had any chance at succeeding in national politics. Further, he suspected the States Rights Party – the Dixiecrats – carried too much racist baggage to be an effective representative of the new South that he envisioned. With their harsh rhetoric, many of the Dixiecrats reeked of the old days, when the Ku Klux Klan roamed the countryside freely and demagogues like Cole Blease could rally white voters by threatening to "lead the lynch mob" to keep blacks in their place.²⁸⁴ Byrnes had been a national political figure for three decades. As a senator, he had been Roosevelt's chief southern ally pushing New Deal legislation during the 1930s. Rewarded with an appointment to the US Supreme Court, Byrnes resigned in 1942 to take on the role of FDR's "assistant president" during the war. Later, he helped negotiate the peace and usher in the Cold War as Truman's secretary of state. He understood how public opinion had shifted in the North since that day in 1919, when he had stood in the well of the House of Representatives to denounce W.E.B Du Bois and his NAACP magazine, *The Crisis*, as an agent of the communist threat.²⁸⁵ Winning that argument had been relatively easy, given the paucity of national

²⁸³ Robertson, *Sly and Able*," 496; Fredrickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*," 180.

²⁸⁴ Simon, "The Appeal of Cole Blease of South Carolina."

²⁸⁵ As the NAACP began to gain traction in the South during and after World War I, Byrnes denounced Du Bois as a traitor and claimed his articles in the *Crisis* had incited racial violence and supported the spread of Soviet communism among southern blacks.

support for civil rights at that time. Now, with black soldiers returning from the war against fascism and the United States presenting itself to the world as a beacon of democracy, Byrnes understood the need for white southerners to craft a new message to defend the racial status quo.

In the years after the 1948 Dixiecrat campaign, Byrnes unveiled a new narrative in support of white rule in the South, one that replaced the rebel yell of “white supremacy” with a more modulated and sophisticated argument in favor of states’ rights and the “southern custom” of segregation. Under Byrnes’ leadership, the state of South Carolina would concede that it had not lived up to its responsibilities under the “separate but equal” doctrine that undergirded segregation in the South. But he said the state would rectify this failing. The overwhelming majority of white southerners wanted both races to prosper and to live in harmony, Byrnes contended, but they also remained deeply committed to segregation. If civil rights agitators and their liberal allies pushed too hard – if they challenged southern traditions too aggressively – they would empower the Ku Klux Klan and other white militants and trigger a race war in the South. Byrnes proposed the creation of a genuinely “separate but equal” social arrangement in the South. By raising taxes and spending the money necessary to “equalize” black schools, South Carolina would prove its commitment to the constitutional doctrine of “separate but equal.” The state would carry out a civil act intended to preserve the nation’s democratic heritage, protect individual liberties, and enhance race relations, Byrnes argued. Rather than defy the ideals of the founding fathers, such a system would uphold a firmly established American tradition and benefit all citizens, black and white.

One historian would call it “one of the most inflammatory speeches on race ever read into the *Congressional Record*.” See: Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 85-86.

Byrnes had hoped the carrot and the stick offered in his new approach would appease northern liberal opinion and put the brakes on local black activism. But he was mistaken on both counts. The elder statesman understood how to craft a new message on segregation that appealed to white southerners and some of his former colleagues on Capitol Hill. But he misjudged the shift in northern public opinion, and he misread the scope and tenacity of the black political movement in South Carolina. The state had changed since 1919, when Byrnes was a young congressman representing a strip of counties along the Savannah River. It had changed since his last statewide campaign, when he defeated Cole Blease in 1930 to claim a seat in the US Senate. Black South Carolinians had been politically invisible and easily intimidated back then. The state now had an engaged and mostly united African American community, with NAACP branches operating across the state and coordinating their efforts through the state conference of branches. It had a black political organization, the Progressive Democratic Party, which was registering and mobilizing black voters. And it had a weekly newspaper that was not about to heed the governor's warning and let up the pressure on the white leadership.

McCray's *Lighthouse and Informer* was the public face of the new, politically active African American in South Carolina. McCray used its editorial page to mock and ridicule Byrnes' new approach to white rule in the state. He called the equalization effort a frantic effort "undertaken in desperation" to fool Northerners. The state "has never done, is not now doing, and will never do justice to the Negro until and unless it is beaten

over the head with a federal court blackjack,” McCray wrote, adding, “the Negroes are rapidly putting the blackjack into the hands of the federal courts.”²⁸⁶

Byrnes claimed that Truman and the northern liberals, not the segregationists in the South, presented the greatest threat to the American way of life. The growing federal government proposed under Truman’s “Fair Deal” policies would eventually overwhelm the states and clear the way for socialist and communist influences to destroy democracy. Such a system would enslave American citizens of both races. Like Thurmond, Byrnes wanted to downplay the issue of race and focus instead on the threat of government repression of individual and states’ rights. Unlike the Dixiecrats, however, Byrnes had the national stature required to sell this new frame in the North. At least many in the white press in the South thought so. The columnist John Temple Graves, a fixture on editorial pages across the region, said Byrnes gave the states’ rights message “the liberal touch it needs, the national prestige, the countrywide scope, the broader gauge, the victory sign.”²⁸⁷

Byrnes signaled his break from Truman and his return to public life in June of 1949 in a commencement address at Virginia’s Washington & Lee University. “Byrnes Hits Trend to ‘Welfare State,’” declared *The New York Times* in its headline the next day. Without mentioning Truman by name, and with no references to racial issues, Byrnes declared the nation was “going down the road to statism.” He claimed the president’s economic policies would eventually transform American citizens into serfs: “If some of

²⁸⁶ “Why Not Tell It all,” *Lighthouse and Informer*, July 14, 1951.

²⁸⁷ John Temple Graves, “The Press Looks at Jimmy Byrnes and Likes What It Sees,” *Winnsboro (S.C.) News and Herald*, January 26, 1951. Graves’ column appeared in several South Carolina newspapers, including the *Charleston News and Courier* and the *Columbia Record*.

the new programs seriously proposed should be adopted, there is danger that the individual – whether farmer, worker, manufacturer, lawyer, or doctor – will soon be an economic slave pulling an oar in the galley of the state.”²⁸⁸ Of course, Byrnes had been a champion of policies that expanded federal government power during the New Deal and in the early years of the war. But FDR had never firmly and unequivocally supported black civil rights in the South. Truman was different. With his continued push for civil rights legislation, including passage of anti-poll tax and anti-lynch laws, as well as the creation of a permanent Federal Employment Protection Commission, Truman had become the first US president since Reconstruction to place his administration squarely in support of civil rights reform.

Throughout 1949, Byrnes had been dropping hints to friends and political allies that he might come out of retirement and run for governor of South Carolina the next year. By the time he addressed the Southern Governors Conference in Biloxi, Mississippi, that November, he had made his plans well known, and the state press paid close attention. In Columbia, the *State* showcased the speech with a triple-decker headline across three columns on the front page: “Byrnes Hits Truman’s Spending Policies, Asks Cuts in Taxes and Debt.” In a sidebar story running nearby, the newspaper highlighted a political scoop unearthed by Washington syndicated columnist Robert S. Allen: Bernard Baruch, the financier from South Carolina who had long been close to Byrnes, was working behind the scenes to put together an Eisenhower-Byrnes presidential ticket in 1952. Eisenhower would run as a Republican, Byrnes as a defecting conservative Democrat, and together, Allen reported, the two would form a winning

²⁸⁸ “Byrnes Hits Trend to ‘Welfare State’,” *New York Times*, Jan. 19, 1949, 2; See also: Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 497; Crespino, *Strom Thurmond’s America*, 87-88.

coalition against Truman and the Democrats.²⁸⁹ On Samuel Latimer's editorial page, the *State* cheered the proposed coalition ticket, saying it would bring "a breath of fresh air to the political situation" and would have "tremendous appeal to patriotic citizens in every section of the country."²⁹⁰ The *News and Courier* also reported Byrnes speech on the front page and later featured an Associated Press analysis under a three-column headline: "Byrnes Viewed as New States' Rights Leader." Lower in the news story, the AP reporter employed a familiar journalistic tactic – quoting an unnamed but ubiquitous source known as "some observers" – to explain Byrnes' larger goal. The elder statesman wanted white southern conservatives to break with the "Truman liberals" in the Democratic Party and form a "solid and lasting coalition" with the Republican Party.²⁹¹ In the same way that McCray and black leaders had helped lead blacks away from Republican loyalty in South Carolina a decade earlier, Byrnes now wanted white southerners to cut their long-held ties to the Democratic Party.

Byrnes was following the lead of his South Carolina forebear, John C. Calhoun, who one hundred years earlier had claimed that southern slave states had the power to control national politics if they could unite as one voice and avoid committing to one party. As political free agents, a unified southern vote could swing elections and win Congressional battles by forming ad hoc coalitions with conservative forces elsewhere in the country. In doing so, the South could dictate policy through its decisive role in

²⁸⁹ "Byrnes Hits Truman's Spending Policies, Asks Cuts in Taxes and Debt," *The State*, Nov. 22, 1949, 1.; "Eisenhower-Byrnes Ticket Said Planned for Presidential Race," *The State*, Nov. 22, 1949, 1

²⁹⁰ "Ike and Jimmy," *The State*, Nov. 23, 1949.

²⁹¹ John S. Cutter, "Byrnes Viewed as New States Rights Leader," *Associated Press*, Nov. 27, 1949, as appeared on page 1 of the *Charleston News and Courier*.

creating what Calhoun called “the concurrent majority.”²⁹² The Dixiecrats may have been political amateurs, but Byrnes believed they had the correct political strategy. Southern states, voting as a bloc, could control the Electoral College and swing the presidential race toward either major political party. If the South could break its historic ties to the Democrats and “let the leaders of both parties know we are not in the bag of any political party,” Byrnes said, the South could rise again as the most powerful force in national politics. As governor, he planned to break up the “Solid South” and lead white southerners away from the Democrats, at least at the presidential level, but he knew this would not be easy. In early 1950s, many white South Carolinians still viewed the GOP as “the party of Lincoln,” the invading force that inflicted Reconstruction on the homeland.

As he gradually unveiled his plan, Byrnes treaded carefully on the issue of race. He wanted to frame his break with the “Truman liberals” as an honorable difference of opinion about taxes, spending, and the constitutional question of states’ rights, not the rejectionist stance of a white supremacist who refused to accept change. Yet Byrnes’ decision to re-enter politics came at a time when Truman was pressing hard to keep civil rights in the spotlight. In the weeks leading up to Byrnes’ Biloxi speech, Truman had been out stumping in support of civil-rights reform legislation. “Truman to Stand for No Letup in Battle for Civil Rights Laws,” a front-page headline declared in *The State* on November 16. The story detailed Truman’s speech honoring civil rights pioneer Mary McLeod Bethune, who was retiring as head of the National Council of Negro Women. A native of South Carolina, Bethune had been a member of FDR’s informal “black cabinet”

²⁹² Calhoun’s unveiled his theory of the “concurrent majority” in his treatise, *A Disquisition on Government*, written in 1850. See also: Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 501-502.

during the 1930s, and her name was anathema to staunch white supremacists in the South. The president praised her work fighting “racial or religious discrimination” and vowed to push forward his civil rights legislation: “We are going to continue to advance in our program of bringing equal rights and equal opportunities to all citizens,” Truman said. “In that great cause, there is no retreat and no retirement.”²⁹³

Truman’s remarks came five days before Byrnes’ speech to the southern governors in Biloxi, yet in their initial coverage, South Carolina’s major white newspapers avoided linking Byrnes’ attacks on Truman to civil rights and racial issues. They focused instead on his criticism of Truman’s “Fair Deal” spending policies. And that is just how Byrnes wanted it. He hoped to succeed where the Dixiecrats had failed by elevating the discussion to center on economic policy and constitutional issues. The national press was not as cooperative as the state papers, however. An Associated Press reporter pointed out Byrnes’ strategy. The former senator wanted to expand the states’ rights debate and make it “broader than the racial issues” that prompted the southern split with the national party in 1948.²⁹⁴

In his home state, Byrnes did face one criticism, and it came from William Watts Ball, the editor of the *News and Courier*. Deeply conservative, Ball had opposed New Deal spending programs going back to 1933, and he took pleasure in noting Byrnes’ sudden reversal on the question of deficit spending. The former senator’s attacks on Truman’s policies “should be applauded,” Ball wrote, but Byrnes’ excuse for his support of New Deal spending policies during the Depression “is hollow.” Byrnes had claimed in

²⁹³ “Truman to Stand for No Letup in Battle for Civil Rights Laws,” *The State*, Nov. 16, 1949, 1.

²⁹⁴ Cutter, “Byrnes Viewed as New States Rights Leader,” *Associated Press*.

the speech to the governors that the Depression was a crisis that required emergency measures. That crisis was over, Byrnes said, and the need for deficit spending had long passed. Ball had been one of the few Southern editors to oppose federal intervention in the economy even during the darkest days of the Depression, and he reveled in the irony of Byrnes now stepping forward to lead the criticism of policies that he had once helped facilitate. The Roosevelt administration “treated the country as a silly mother spoils a whimpering child by giving it candy and making it sick,” Ball wrote. He concluded that “morally the country has been sick since 1933” and as FDR’s ally in the Senate, Byrnes deserved blame for “the sowing of the germs.”²⁹⁵

Ball enjoyed tweaking Byrnes about his New deal connection and his about-face on taxes and spending, but the editor took a more serious tone on the issue of race. Ball had been arguing since 1933 that New Deal reforms would eventually undermine “the southern way of life” and empower both working-class whites and blacks. As Byrnes prepared to re-enter politics in South Carolina, Ball returned to the topic in an editorial headlined “Civil Rights and Socialism.” The editor claimed that increased federal involvement in state activities would inevitably bring an end to racial segregation in the South. In his typical bombastic style, Ball wrote that when the federal government “shall own and operate the public utilities; when it shall be the insurer of the people against illness, old age and penury; when it shall be the financial patron of schools and colleges; when it shall furnish the free lunches for the children and haul them to the schoolhouses; when it shall assume the medicinal and surgical care of all their health; when it shall be good Old Mother with a whip of nine lashes and millions of spoons in her hand, it will

²⁹⁵ “Will and Belatedly Said,” *Charleston News and Courier*, Nov. 23, 1949, 4.

and must certainly force the obliteration of distinctions of race.” Ball had disliked the spread of democracy when it brought poor, working-class whites into the political system. Now, he feared federal encroachment on state turf would further undermine the foundations of southern society and eventually end white rule in the region. The federal government already had more than two million employees, thanks in part to Byrnes’ work during the New Deal, the editor wrote, and under the Truman plan government would expand again and likely bring “many negroes to offices of high power and responsibility” in the South. Ball defined the term “civil rights” as “the wiping out of differences between the races in the United States,” and he claimed that Byrnes had contributed to the current crisis through his early support for the New Deal.²⁹⁶ Byrnes may have wanted to elevate the debate beyond race, but the feisty Charleston editor would not cooperate.

Byrnes announced his candidacy for governor in January 1950, and he coasted to victory in the July Democratic primary. Ralph McGill, the liberal editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, described the primary race as more a “coronation than a campaign.”²⁹⁷ By the time of his inaugural address the following January, United States forces were fighting on the Korean peninsula, and news about the hot war in Asia and the Cold War in Europe dominated the newspapers and benefited Byrnes’ effort to downplay the racial issue. On inauguration day, the late edition of the capital city’s afternoon newspaper, *The Columbia Record*, bannered an eight-column headline: “100,000 Hear Byrnes Warn Against Russia.” The former secretary of state’s comments about the Soviets and the

²⁹⁶ “Civil Rights and Socialism, *News and Courier*, January 7, 1949, 4.

²⁹⁷ Ralph McGill, “What is Jimmy Byrnes Up To Now?” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 14, 1950.

Chinese dominated statewide coverage of the event. But in his inaugural address, Byrnes also presented his fullest expression yet of how he intended to frame the white response to the black civil rights reform movement. Byrnes called for a dramatic increase in spending on black education in South Carolina -- \$75 million for school-building projects, supported by the sale of state government bonds, plus a new 3% sales tax, with revenues to be split equally between black and white school systems. South Carolina had failed to deliver on the promise of “separate but equal” education, Byrnes told the crowd, and if southerners were going to demand states’ rights, they must carry out state responsibilities. “We should do it because it is right,” Byrnes said. “For me, that is sufficient reason. If any person wants an additional reason, I say it is wise.”²⁹⁸

Byrnes’ decision to spend heavily to equalize school facilities drew some criticism in South Carolina but the governor was more concerned about the rising civil rights movement in the South, particularly its growing support in the North. Almost one month to the day before the inauguration, Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP had filed suit in federal court on behalf of black families in Clarendon County challenging the county’s segregated school system. During the New Deal, the Santee and Cooper rivers had been harnessed in a massive public works project to bring electricity to South Carolina’s rural Low Country. The resulting lakes became popular recreational areas, but during parts of the year the spider web of feeder streams crisscrossing the tenant farmlands around Santee-Cooper became impassable. One of those farmers, Harry Briggs, claimed that his son and other black children often had to row across a flooded creek and walk miles to reach their one-room school, while white children rode a school

²⁹⁸ Inaugural address of James Francis Byrnes, Jan. 15, 1951, Columbia, South Carolina. JFB Gubernatorial Papers.

bus. In 1947, Briggs and the other black families had merely requested a school bus of their own. When the state refused, the NAACP filed suit demanding equal facilities for the black schools in Clarendon's school district 22. On December 22, 1950, however, the NAACP withdrew its earlier complaint and upped the ante by filing a new suit. *Briggs v. Elliott* would drop the request for equal facilities and demand an end to segregated schools entirely.²⁹⁹

Byrnes and his allies realized the school systems in Clarendon County and the rest of the state were far from equal. As Richard Kluger noted in his definitive study of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, Clarendon County in the late 1940s and early 1950s might have been the one place in America "where life among black folk had changed the least since the end of slavery."³⁰⁰ Throughout rural South Carolina, many black schools were little more than wooden shacks lacking electricity, running water, and indoor toilets. But the governor wanted to persuade federal judges to give the state time to fix the problem. And he claimed black South Carolinians supported his efforts: "The overwhelming majority of colored people in this state do not want to force their children into white schools," Byrnes argued. "Except for the professional agitators, what the colored people want and what they are entitled to is equal facilities in their schools. We must see that they get them."³⁰¹ The governor hoped to undermine northern liberals who supported civil rights by claiming that blacks in South Carolina supported his plan. Yet to the governor's surprise and anger, McCray's newspaper and his allies in the NAACP

²⁹⁹ Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976; Vintage, 2004).

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 35.

³⁰¹ "Inaugural Address of James Francis Byrnes," Jan. 15, 1951, Columbia, South Carolina. JFB Gubernatorial Papers.

would rally black support to continue the challenge against school segregation in the state.

Byrnes' promise to raise taxes and borrow money to support black education came with an associated threat: If federal courts refused to grant South Carolina time to reform its school system and insisted on immediate integration, the state would abandon public schools altogether. To back up his words, Byrnes proposed a referendum to amend the state constitution and remove the requirement that the state legislature fund public grade-school education. During Reconstruction, black and white legislators had first included the constitutional requirement that lawmakers fund public education in the state, and "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman and the white supremacist Democrats who rewrote the document in 1895 retained the commitment to free grade-school education.³⁰² Under Byrnes' plan a "yes" vote on the referendum would clear the way for white lawmakers to abolish the public schools in South Carolina if the federal courts demanded that black and white children attend school together. With his inaugural address, Byrnes inched closer to the view of southern white liberals who were eager for at least the appearance of gradual change, but he refused to rule out militant resistance as well. Byrnes conceded Jim Crow had failed black families in the state but warned that white southerners would go only so far in reforming the system: "Whatever is necessary to continue the separation of the

³⁰² Kantrowitz, "Ben Tillman," 214-214; Thomas Holt, *Black Over White: Negro Leadership in South Carolina during Reconstruction* (Champaign and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979), 152-171; Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 185-195.

racism in the schools of South Carolina is going to be done by the white people of the state.”³⁰³

Byrnes walked a fine line between promising real reforms in the state and threatening a white backlash if civil rights supporters and their northern allies refused to accept his plan. For example, the new governor won praise in the North and the South for his tough stand against the Klan. Once a powerful force in state politics, the twentieth century version of the Ku Klux Klan had withered since its heyday in the 1920s, when Cole Blease signaled his support for the organization.³⁰⁴ In the late 1940s, Grand Dragon Thomas Hamilton relocated from Georgia and tried to build a new hooded empire in South Carolina. His group carried out cross-burnings and fiery attacks in several small towns that received widespread coverage in the press.³⁰⁵ Despite Thurmond’s objections, local Klan organizations had publicly supported the Dixiecrats in 1948. Determined to avoid such a connection, Byrnes joined with several other southern governors in proposing anti-mask and anti-cross burning laws. The measures made it illegal for an adult to obscure his face in public or to burn a cross on private property without the

³⁰³ Ibid; For more on Byrnes’ reform effort, see: Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 492-525; Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, 139-150; Numan Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2008); For a consideration of the Byrnes’ reform effort from a Congressional perspective, see: Keith M. Finley, *Defying the Dream: Southern Senators and the Fight Against Civil Rights, 1938-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

³⁰⁴ See Simon, “The Appeal of Cole Blease,” 57-86; Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 90-92.

³⁰⁵ David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New Viewpoints, 1976), 337-38; Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 290-91; See also: Ward, *Defending White Democracy*, ” 129-30.

owner's consent.³⁰⁶ In proposing the laws, however, Byrnes again tried to depict the black community as divided, with a majority in support of "separate but equal" schools and only a tiny minority trying to stir up trouble. In this case, he linked the Klan and the NAACP and implied both posed a threat to public safety. It was the governor's job to keep order, Byrnes said, and "I do not need the assistance of the Ku Klux Klan, nor do I want interference by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People."³⁰⁷

For James Rogers, the white liberal editor of the *Florence Morning News*, Byrnes' inaugural speech was nearly perfect. Rogers had detested the "rabble-rousing" of Thurmond and the Dixiecrats. But he disliked local black activists like editor John H. McCray and his *Lighthouse and Informer* newspaper as well. Like many of his southern liberal counterparts, Rogers believed in the existence of a "silent" southern majority that supported a safe middle path between Klan militants who called for violent resistance and the civil rights activists who demanded immediate equality. With his inaugural message, Byrnes appeared to speak to just such a silent majority, Rogers said. In his view, the governor represented "the assertion of common sense" and "moral conscience," not southern racial prejudice. Rogers predicted that "every state in which the races are separate will follow Byrnes and South Carolina in their fight to preserve the segregated system." But to win that battle, he wrote, southerners must keep the argument "on the high plane" established by Byrnes and avoid inflaming "the passions of the ignorant and the prejudiced who have brought and can continue to bring immeasurable damage to the

³⁰⁶ Byrnes' anti-mask law made an exception for one night a year – Halloween. See: "James F. Byrnes Inaugural Address, January 15, 1951," JFB Gubernatorial Papers.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

cause.” Like Byrnes, Rogers placed much of the blame for radical Klan activity on pushy black activists who were asking for too much, too quickly. The editor implied that the state’s civil rights movement held the future of public education in its hands: “When the Negro, by his insistence on the end of segregation, destroys tax-supported schools, he has destroyed his own best, if not only, chance of education.”³⁰⁸

In explaining the Klan’s revival in South Carolina, Byrnes would return to an argument he had made early in his political career. As a young member of Congress, he had accused W.E.B Du Bois and *The Crisis* of aiding the Soviets and conspiring to bring down US democracy because of the magazine’s scathing editorials against lynching and white violence in the South in 1919. Byrnes seemed to be arguing that any criticism of the United States, even if well founded, was tantamount to treasonous support for Soviet communism. Now, thirty years later, he blamed McCray’s *Lighthouse and Informer* and its anti-Klan editorials for the reemergence of the racist organization in the state. He claimed the paper’s fiery rhetoric and its publication of photographs of “white women dancing with Negroes” had fueled resentment and provoked white militants to embrace mob violence. In a letter to a white minister who complained about the “fascist” Klan, Byrnes pinned the blame on the black newspaper: “The attitude of the Negro press has been of wonderful assistance to the Klan. It makes it easy for the Grand Dragon to arouse the prejudices of the people.”³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ “Governor Byrnes has Sound and Sober Word for Southern Negroes and Their School Fight,” *Florence Morning News*, March 18, 1951.

³⁰⁹ James F. Byrnes to R.C. Griffith, November 20, 1951, General Subjects File, Box 1, Folder “Ku Klux Klan,” JFB Gubernatorial Papers.

The *Lighthouse and Informer* continued to attack Byrnes' equalization proposal. McCray was especially irritated by the paternalism inherent in Byrnes' call for blacks to step aside and keep quiet while whites correct the injustices of the state's educational and political systems. "Let the politicians and white supremacists scream all they want," McCray railed in an editorial headlined "Segregation Now in the Negro's Hands." The case against "jimcrowism" was now working its way through the courts, and the NAACP and its supporters believed both public and legal opinion had shifted in their favor. In his sarcastic style, McCray said white leaders needed to accept that Negroes had taken control of their political fate: "The politician or white supremacist who has backed racial discrimination, especially segregation, suspects it, and the student of civil and legal events knows it: The Negro now can call the tune he wants the white fiddling South to play, and eventually the white South has no alternative but to play, though it may scream, rant and rave." Even if the courts reject the Clarendon County case and refuse to outlaw segregation entirely, McCray argued, they had already ordered states to provide equal facilities, and South Carolina could never afford to fund two truly equal school systems. Such a policy would require massive tax increases and government borrowing and would likely bankrupt the state. If black South Carolinians demanded full equalization, McCray said, eventually "segregation is going to be wiped out." The editor concluded with a zinger that captured in one short paragraph the remarkable change in African American attitudes since Byrnes had last run for statewide offices in the state: "So don't go around asking a governor or a major or a police chief what's going to happen and when on this issue. Ask the Negro, the little and big Negro, what he's going to do, how, and when."³¹⁰

³¹⁰ John H. McCray, "Segregation Now in the Negroes Hands," *Lighthouse and Informer*,

McCray would pay a serious price for his militant stance. In January 1950, just a week before Byrnes announced his gubernatorial campaign, both McCray and an Associated Press reporter, Deling Booth, were indicted on charges of libel. The case centered on their accounts of a rape case involving Willie Tolbert, a 25-year-old black man convicted of assaulting a white teenager near Greenwood, South Carolina. The young woman's account of what happened that night was, as one historian has noted, "nothing less than fantastic."³¹¹ She said she and her boyfriend were sitting in a parked car chatting when Tolbert forced his way into the vehicle. Like a scene from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee's famous novel set in 1930s Alabama, the teenager claimed Tolbert understood the consequences of his actions but was so overcome with sexual desire for her that he proceeded anyway. She said he told her he wanted her to have his child. The young woman never explained how Tolbert, a 5'9", 150-pound city worker who was unarmed, managed to commit the sexual act while holding the young woman's boyfriend at bay. Tolbert claimed the sex had been consensual. He said he helped the teenagers buy liquor and, after a night of drinking, they had invited him to join in the sexual acts. Yet the court never heard Tolbert's story. He was advised not to testify, and the all-white jury quickly convicted. He was electrocuted on October 28, 1949.³¹²

Before his execution, Tolbert had granted death-row interviews to both McCray and Booth, and both had published his claim that the sex was consensual but without using the teenage girl's name. Nonetheless, county solicitor Hugh Beasley – who

March 15, 1952.

³¹¹ Frederickson, "The Dixiecrat Revolt," 211.

³¹² Frederickson, "The Dixiecrat Revolt," 208-216; Roefs, "Leading the Civil Rights Vanguard," 482-483; Charles Franklin Beall, "With Malice Intent: John McCray, Willie Tolbert and the Struggle for Equal Justice in South Carolina," Unpublished Honors Thesis, University of Virginia, 1987; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 211-216.

happened to be the girl's father – charged the two journalists with violating a South Carolina criminal statute prohibiting the media from defaming the victims of sexual assault. Backed by the resources of the AP, Booth had his case dismissed without a trial. When the prosecutors refused to drop the case against McCray, the national black press responded in anger. The *Chicago Defender* called the case “a challenge to freedom of the press, one of the fundamental principles of our democracy.”³¹³

Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP's legal team helped prepare McCray's case, but they wanted to find a local white lawyer to take the lead role in court. Few would consider it, given the rising racial tension in South Carolina and the political connections of the young woman's family. Jack Greenberg, an NAACP lawyer, said the atmosphere was so hostile in Columbia that a white lawyer who covertly aided McCray asked the editor's legal team “to enter his house through the back door.” Greenberg said the lawyer “would have been ruined if his involvement became known.”³¹⁴ On the advice of his attorneys, McCray pleaded guilty to avoid going in front of an all-white jury. He received a \$3000 fine and was placed on three years' probation, but the outcome allowed him to continue publishing the *Lighthouse and Informer*.

In August 1951, McCray was arrested and charged with violating the rules of his probation, which prohibited him from traveling outside South Carolina. The circumstances around his arrest remain a mystery. McCray claimed his parole officer told him he could make short business trips out of the state, and he had done so several times since his plea bargain. In October 1950, he had delivered the keynote address at an event

³¹³ *Chicago Defender*, Jan. 21, 1950.

³¹⁴ Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Legislation* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 54-57.

hosted by African American congressman William Dawson of Illinois. The following month, he traveled to Durham, North Carolina, to speak at the Omega Psi Phi fraternity's Black Achievement Week function. Nine months later, McCray was arrested without warning and charged with disobeying his probation order. When the state Supreme Court rejected McCray's final appeal, the editor was ordered to serve on a Newberry County chain gang from November 11 to December 18, 1952. McCray and his allies have suggested Byrnes had grown so frustrated by his editorials on the Clarendon County case that he looked for other means to silence the editor, although there is no hard evidence to support this claim. Marshall and Greenberg of the NAACP have said they suspected it was true. And so did the black press. The *Pittsburgh Courier* said McCray's constant criticism of Byrnes' school equalization program had made him "a marked man" in South Carolina.³¹⁵

Rather than derail black activism in the state, McCray's indictment in January 1950 helped mobilize African Americans. They resented what they perceived to be an obvious act of intimidation, and they rallied to support the editor. The National Negro Press Association had created the Lighthouse Defense Committee to raise money, but the campaign to defend McCray gained real momentum at the grassroots. Local NAACP branches and Progressive Democratic Party clubs led the effort across the state. They organized John H. McCray Days and held mass meetings and teach-ins to generate support – and to encourage voter registration. They gathered donations from small-business owners, teachers' associations, and fraternal organizations. A group of eighth graders from Florence raised \$10 for the cause. The donor lists also show hundreds of

³¹⁵ Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 55; *Pittsburgh Courier*, Dec. 13, 1952.

individuals digging deep to contribute a dollar or two, at what must have been a great sacrifice to black families in South Carolina in 1950. Along with their hard-earned money, black South Carolinians included poignant letters tying McCray's fight with their own struggle to gain political equality in the state.³¹⁶

The Tolbert case and McCray's indictment would become a hot topic in a bitter Senate race in 1950, and it would give African Americans a chance to flex their muscles at the polls and show just how far they had come in the past decade. The state's junior senator, Olin Johnston, was up for re-election in 1950, and outgoing governor Strom Thurmond, who was prevented by law from seeking a second term, challenged him in the Democratic Party primary. Byrnes' race for governor may have been a "coronation" that year, but the 1950 Senate contest was an old-fashioned South Carolina "cockfight." The two men disliked each other, and Thurmond, coming off his disappointing Dixiecrat campaign, worried that another poor showing could end his political career. He stayed on the offensive, attacking Johnston daily. Both men supported segregation and white political rule in the state, but Thurmond thought he saw a way to undermine Johnston on the issue.

In the final days of the campaign, Thurmond's team created an ad that suggested Johnston had pressured the judge in Greenwood to grant McCray's request for a change of venue in the case. The Dixiecrat campaign, with its harsh rhetoric and Klan support, had turned the black community against Thurmond, despite his firm stance against lynching in the Willie Earle case. Johnston was no better on the issue of segregation, and he adamantly opposed Truman's civil rights reform efforts. But the senator was a staunch

³¹⁶ See: JHM Papers, Box 4.

supporter of the president's "Fair Deal" economic policies. For those reasons, black South Carolinians were already leaning toward Johnston, but Thurmond's ad vilifying McCray sealed the issue. Modjeska Monteith Simkins, the political activist who had helped found McCray's *Lighthouse and Informer*, came out strongly in favor of Johnston as the lesser of the two evils, and she helped mobilize the local PDP clubs to get out the vote in the 1950 Senate race. Based on voter registration figures reported by William D. Workman, Jr., the capital correspondent for the *Charleston News and Courier*, an estimated that 70,000 blacks had qualified to vote in 1950, up from about 30,000 in 1948. From his perch at the state capitol, Workman noticed other examples of African Americans exhibiting a new engagement in state politics: more statehouse visits by "negro school groups and individual Negroes"; more requests for publications and information and a greater interest in important state agencies; and more Negro letters to the editors of white newspapers.³¹⁷ A week before the July 11 primary vote, the *Lighthouse and Informer* sent a strong message to the newly registered black voters: it ran a sample ballot on the front page that encouraged blacks to vote for Johnston over Thurmond in the Senate race.³¹⁸

South Carolina's white politicians and press had been eyeing the black vote warily since US District Judge Waites Waring's 1947 ruling had opened the state's Democratic Party primaries. Nonetheless, the results of the 1950 Senate primary were stunning. In what was expected to be a close race, Johnston won by nearly 30,000 votes. A former textile worker himself, the senator had strong support from labor in the Upstate

³¹⁷ William D. Workman, Jr., Untitled Article for *Charleston News and Courier*, WDW Papers: Campaigns, 1950.

³¹⁸ *Lighthouse and Informer*, July 8, 1950.

region he called home. Yet black voters gave him his margin of victory. An estimated 40,000 African Americans voted in the Senate race and returns from predominantly black precincts in Charleston and Columbia revealed that most had voted for Johnston.³¹⁹ Thurmond's advisers later admitted they underestimated the strength of the PDP and its ability to turn out African American voters, even in the rural Black Belt region of South Carolina. The results of the Johnston-Thurmond Senate race suggested the days of white politicians intimidating and dividing the black community appeared to be over. African Americans were "much wiser and better informed than yesteryear," McCray would argue in the *Lighthouse and Informer*. The black voter of the 1950s could "see through the veil" cast by white politicians and discern "their real intent." Now, McCray said, black South Carolinians know "what is actually possible."³²⁰

Byrnes had avoided endorsing a candidate in the 1950 Senate race, much to Thurmond's disappointment. The incoming governor presented himself as an elder statesman who was above politics, a wise and thoughtful moderate who had no future ambition other than to help South Carolinians safely navigate dangerous times. He wanted to be seen as a friend and counsel to both races, a calm voice of reason who could stand up to white militant Klansmen and black agitators as well. The white press embraced and helped enhance this image. But blacks saw through the veil, as McCray called it. They had a different vision of Byrnes, not the avuncular elder statesman but the angry white supremacist who only wanted to protect the racial status quo. Byrnes wanted blacks to slow down, to temper their request for change. But as McCray had noted back in 1944, black South Carolinians had "beaten down the fear" that white supremacists had

³¹⁹ *The State*, July 12, 1950.

³²⁰ "New Ideas, but Old Lines," *Lighthouse and Informer*, July 5, 1952.

once used so successfully to divide and crush black political aspirations.³²¹ By leveraging their growing support from the federal courts, liberal allies in Congress, and northern public opinion, African Americans had gained access to the ballot box and finally re-emerged as a force in southern electoral politics.

Byrnes appeared to be a moderate voice in the battle over civil rights in the early 1950s. Yet he had launched his political career as a protégé of “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman and been a staunch white supremacist. He regularly expressed his fear that black South Carolinians would one day regain the political power they had lost at the close of Reconstruction. As a young congressman in the summer of 1919, Byrnes had taken to the House floor to accuse the NAACP of communist ties and to encourage African Americans to leave the country “if they didn’t like it here.” At the time, Ball was the editor of *The State* newspaper in Columbia. To the aristocratic editor, Byrnes’ comments sounded more like the words of Cole Blease, not the more sophisticated and paternalistic conservative that Byrnes aspired to be. In a letter to Byrnes, Ball accused the congressmen of demagoguery. In his reply, Byrnes agreed that his language had been too harsh. But he also revealed a key motivation that would drive his political thinking over the years. Byrnes argued that whites in South Carolina must always remain vigilant against the threat of black political participation. Given the size of the black population, Byrnes wrote, “a fair registration” process would grant blacks great political power in the

³²¹ John H. McCray to Thurgood Marshall, November 9, 1944, II-B, 2009, NAACP Papers; See also: Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 191.

state. For that reason, he said every issue in South Carolina “must include this consideration of the race question.”³²²

The “race question” in South Carolina would take a significant turn in December 1950, a few months before Byrnes took office as governor. The NAACP’s decision to file suit against school District 22 in Clarendon County was historic. The complaint in *Briggs v. Elliott* signaled a major shift in NAACP strategy – from fighting school inequality to confronting the act of segregation itself. The Clarendon County case would mark the first time in the twentieth century that school segregation would be challenged directly in a southern court. Although Columbia’s afternoon newspaper, *The Columbia Record*, placed the story of the suit’s filing on the bottom of the front page, the much larger morning paper, *The State*, did not. Instead, the newspaper ran a short Associated Press story on page B8, tucked under an item about an American Legion toy drive and next to the death and funeral notices.³²³ The paper did give prominent play to another story about black activism that day. It involved the bombing of the home of a black family that had challenged racial zoning laws in Birmingham, Alabama.³²⁴ The message was clear: black activists who pushed too hard would pay a price. African Americans in South Carolina understood this all too well. In Clarendon County, Harry Briggs and his wife would both lose their jobs during their legal battle with the county school system, and the man who

³²² Winfred B. Moore, “New South Statesman: The Political Career of James Francis Byrnes, 1911-1941. PhD diss., Duke University, 1976. See also: Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 86-86.

³²³ Associated Press, “Clarendon Negroes Challenge Segregation in Schools,” *Columbia Record*, Dec. 22, 1950, 1A; Associated Press, “Segregation Suit Filed in U.S. Court,” *The State*, Dec. 23, 1950, 8B.

³²⁴ Associated Press, “Negro Home Bombed in Birmingham,” *The State*, Dec. 23, 1950, 2A.

first brought the NAACP to Clarendon County, Rev. Joseph DeLaine, would have his house burned to the ground.³²⁵

The State's coverage of *Briggs v. Elliott* underwent a dramatic change in June, when the three-judge panel hearing the Clarendon case ruled in favor of the state. "School segregation sustained," blared an eight-column headline stripped across the top of the front page, even above the latest news from the Korean War.³²⁶ Byrnes had surprised Marshall and the NAACP by conceding that South Carolina schools were in fact unequal and asking the court to focus on the state's effort to remedy the problem. Marshall had planned to use witness testimony to emphasize the disparity between black and white schools in South Carolina and to raise doubts about whether a state that had done so little in the past could be trusted to achieve true equality in the future. With that option no longer available, Marshall proceeded with witnesses who testified that segregated schools were inherently unequal, no matter how similar their facilities. As *The State's* reporter explained it: "Several high ranking educators, some of them white men, took the stand today and testified that segregated schools cannot train young people in a democracy right and are detrimental to the children, both of the minority, which is isolated, and the majority, which does the isolating."³²⁷

The three-judge panel voted 2-1 to reject the NAACP's arguments. They upheld segregation as constitutionally legal but ordered Byrnes and his government to return in six months with a detailed plan to equalize schools across South Carolina. In their order,

³²⁵ Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 203.

³²⁶ Tom McMahon, "School Segregation Sustained," *The State*, June 24, 1951, A1.

³²⁷ Tom McMahon, "State Admits Inequalities Exist in Clarendon," *The State*, May 29, 1951.

the judges said federal courts “would be going far outside their constitutional function were they to attempt to prescribe educational policies” such as segregation, “however desirable such policies might be in the eyes of some sociologists and educators.” Chief Judge John J. Parker of Charlotte and Judge George Bell Timmerman Sr. of Columbia wrote the majority opinion. The lone holdout was Judge Waites Waring of Charleston, whose fiery dissent would foreshadow the Supreme Court’s final ruling in the case – and would further alienate Waring from white society in South Carolina. Waring called segregated schools “per se inequality,” and he said testimony in the case had shown “beyond a shadow of a doubt that the evils of segregation and color prejudices come from early training.” The place to stop it “is in the first grade not in graduate college.” To its credit, *The State* included a key excerpt from Waring’s dissent on its front page.³²⁸

Byrnes had gotten exactly what he wanted from the US District Court, and though the NAACP promised to appeal, the confident governor would describe the court’s ruling as “unanswerable.”³²⁹ As a former US Supreme Court justice himself, he believed the law was clear. The court’s 1896 ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* gave states the right to operate “separate but equal” educational systems, and Byrnes saw no constitutional ground for the high court to overrule this precedent. His allies in the press helped the governor present the court’s ruling as “Victory of American Rights,” as the *News and Courier* called it in a front-page editorial. The majority opinion had “demolished” the NAACP claim that segregated schools violated the “equal protection” clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, the paper argued. The editorial continued: “The court went beyond the

³²⁸ Tom McMahon, “School Segregation Sustained,” *The State*, June 24, 1951, A1.

³²⁹ Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 519.

rights of the states, as set out in the Constitution. The court has upheld an older and an even more basic right, the right of parents to look after the welfare of their children.” The court had “reaffirmed” the rights of the individual, the editorial claimed.³³⁰

Waring would later complain that his fellow judges, Parker and Timmerman, had accepted Byrnes’ arguments before the hearings began and, in their deliberations, “had been throwing aside all the testimony.” Waring said the judges urged him to join a unanimous decision to give Byrnes the support he needed to carry out his equalization plan. He claimed the judges backed their argument with a bit of political prophecy. “A Republican victory was assured” in the 1952 presidential election, Waring said he was told, and without the Truman liberals breathing down his neck, Byrnes could then negotiate a deal to bring about gradual change to the state.³³¹

Byrnes wanted not only to see “a Republican victory” in the presidential election of 1952 but also to be the kingmaker who engineered the GOP win. In November 1951, he returned to the annual Southern Governor’s Conference to make his plans clear. On the last day of the conference, Byrnes announced he would not support Truman’s renomination the next year. He said he had persuaded a majority of southern governors to form a unified bloc and support the best candidate with the best platform, regardless of political party. Byrnes claimed the southerners were prepared to “put loyalty to country above loyalty to party.”³³² The Korean War and concerns about the economy had undermined Truman’s poll numbers, and the threat of another southern revolt further imperiled his chances in 1952. Three months after Byrnes’ comments, Truman

³³⁰ “Victory for American Rights,” *Charleston News and Courier*, June 24, 1951.

³³¹ Yarbrough, *A Passion for Justice*, 181-189.

³³² Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 511;

announced that he would not seek another term as president. The Democrats would nominate another liberal, Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson, while the Republicans would defy their party's more conservative wing, led by Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, and turn instead to a war hero, Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Both parties claimed to support civil rights in 1952, but the GOP platform included language bound to please white southerners: "We believe that it is the primary responsibility of each state to order and control its own domestic institutions, and this power, reserved to the states, is essential to the maintenance of our federal government."³³³ Byrnes and his political operatives helped create an organization, Independents for Eisenhower, that allowed white southerners to leave the Democratic Party without actually embracing the "party of Lincoln" that their grandparents had so despised. During the fall campaign, Byrnes sat nearby as Eisenhower addressed a raucous crowd on the statehouse steps in Columbia. When the band played Dixie, the general rose and sang along. Afterward, when he said, "I always stand up for that song," the crowd let out a collective rebel yell.³³⁴

In November, Eisenhower coasted to victory with strong southern support. Although he did not win South Carolina or any Deep South state, the Republican did carry four of the original eleven states of the Confederacy, the party's best showing in the South since 1928, when southern voters abandoned Democratic nominee Al Smith, a Catholic who opposed Prohibition.³³⁵ *The State* had assured the "dissident Democrats of South Carolina" that a vote for Eisenhower would not be interpreted as a vote for a

³³³ Ibid, 511; See also: Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 226.

³³⁴ "Thousands Hear Eisenhower Pitch for SC Votes," *The State*, Sept. 16, 1952, 1.

³³⁵ Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 512;

Republican, but “a protest against the policies of the present Democratic Administration.”³³⁶ More than 154,000 dissident Democrats joined with about 9,000 Republicans to vote for Eisenhower, who narrowly lost the state to Stevenson. In its editorials, *The State* never mentioned race or civil rights as the reason white Democrats were turning to the Republican candidate. But the *News and Courier* said race played a significant role in the vote tally. The “Negro bloc vote” had supported Stevenson and “he carried (South Carolina) with a MINORITY of traditional Democrats ... Take away “Stevenson’s Negro vote, and it can be seen that most of the traditional Democrats voted for Eisenhower.”³³⁷ It was a theme the *News and Courier* would return to frequently over the coming years: If black voters were joining the Democratic Party, whites voters should look elsewhere for a new political home.

By the end of 1952, Byrnes’ plans for reshaping the debate over civil rights appeared to be working. Truman and his liberal Democratic allies were out of the White House, and southern white voters had helped show them the door. The election would be remembered as “independence day” because the South was now “out of the bag” and no longer committed to one party, Byrnes said in a victory statement that ran on the front pages of the state’s white newspapers.³³⁸ Truman’s civil rights legislation had died in Congress a full year before Eisenhower’s election, and the new administration coming to power in Washington appeared to support Byrnes’ argument in favor of states’ rights. A lower federal court had upheld the doctrine of separate but equal and refused to outlaw segregated schools in South Carolina. Although the NAACP had appealed that ruling,

³³⁶ “Democrats for Ike,” *The State*, Nov. 2, 1952, 4.

³³⁷ “Two-Party State,” *Charleston News and Courier*, Nov. 6, 1952.

³³⁸ “Byrnes Says SC is ‘Out of the Bag,’ Does Not Intend to Get Back Into It,” *The State*, Nov. 5, 1952, 1;

Byrnes had served on the nation's highest court with Chief Justice Fred Vinson and considered him an old friend. He believed the Vinson court would stand by precedent as well. And as a bit of insurance, he obtained the services of perhaps the country's most distinguished jurist to argue the case for the state of South Carolina. John W. Davis, a former Democratic Party presidential candidate, had participated in at least 250 cases before the US Supreme Court. Even John McCray, usually an optimist, expressed concern over the Clarendon case. The lower court ruling "threatens to throw us back," claimed the editorial in McCray's *Lighthouse and Informer*. The newspaper said that if the Supreme Court upheld the district court ruling, it could allow segregation to spread beyond the South.³³⁹

Briggs v. Elliott had been merged with four other cases challenging segregation in southern and border states. In his effort to shift the focus to the constitutional question of states' rights and away from white supremacy and Jim Crow, Byrnes moved to nationalize the case even further. On the eve of the first Supreme Court hearing, in December 1952, Byrnes persuaded the governor of Kansas to file a brief in defense of its segregated school systems, which were also under NAACP attack. The Supreme Court accepted the Kansas case, merged it with other segregation suits, and renamed the case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*.

After the first hearing, in December 1952, the court announced it would not rule immediately but would carry the case over to the next term. Yet Byrnes and Davis remained confident. Byrnes had been talking with his former colleagues on the court,

³³⁹ "The Clarendon Decision Threatens to Throw Us Back," *Lighthouse and Informer*, July 7, 1952, 4.

particularly Justice Felix Frankfurter, and the liberal from Boston appeared to agree with Byrnes that “the whole thing was moving too fast” in the South.³⁴⁰ Harry Ashmore, the liberal editor from Little Rock, was hearing the same thing from his sources inside the court. Frankfurter was especially supportive of Byrnes’ argument concerning the Klan and other extremists. He feared that overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* and outlawing segregation would mean “the guys who talk nigger would be in charge, there would be riots, and the Army would have to be called out.”³⁴¹ Based on what he was hearing, Byrnes had every right to be confident.

By late 1953, however, Byrnes began to receive news that, in his view, was more ominous. Three months before the second hearing, Chief Justice Vinson died suddenly, and Eisenhower replaced him with former California Governor Earl Warren, a liberal Republican who had no ties to Byrnes and whose sympathies on the question of segregation were unknown. If the Warren nomination had shaken Byrnes’ confidence in the Eisenhower administration, the next move shredded it altogether. Byrnes thought he had persuaded the president and his administration to remain neutral in the case, but in late 1953 Attorney General Herbert Brownell filed an amicus brief in support of Marshall and the NAACP. The decision undermined Byrnes’ credibility. Less than a year ago, he had urged white southern voters to rally behind the former general because he believed the Republicans supported states’ rights. Yet in its first major test, the new administration had acted no differently than the Truman liberals had. The shift in northern opinion on civil rights had spread farther than Byrnes had realized, and the governor had

³⁴⁰ Kluger, *Simple Justice*, 760.

³⁴¹ Harry Ashmore, *Hearts and Minds: The Anatomy of Racism from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 188.

overestimated his ability to reverse it. The Republican Party had its conservative wing, but overall the party was not yet as hospitable to the white South as it would become in the next decade.

Byrnes also began to hear favorable chatter about the brief filed by Marshall and the NAACP. The justices had scheduled a second hearing in December 1953 to explore the NAACP's claim that segregated schools violated the "equal protection" clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In response, Marshall had submitted a 235-page brief that made a persuasive case that the amendment did apply to public education.³⁴² A lower-court ruling that Byrnes thought was "unanswerable" now seemed in jeopardy.

The latest developments buoyed McCray's spirits, and his writing in the *Lighthouse and Informer* regained its edge. He praised "the magnificence of the people of Clarendon County," who had dug deep in their own pockets to help launch the case and endured economic and physical retribution to carry it through the appeals process. McCray pointed out an obvious but overlooked fact: Harry Briggs and the African American families in Clarendon County were helping foot the bill for both sides arguing the case – their own NAACP lawyers, and through tax payments, the man defending the state of South Carolina, the "top-priced lawyer who will work against them."³⁴³ McCray claimed the Byrnes administration was conspiring with the white press to "censor" coverage of NAACP activities concerning the Clarendon appeal.³⁴⁴ Whether true or not,

³⁴² Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 510. For more on Marshall's brief and NAACP legal strategy, see: Kluger, *Simple Justice*.

³⁴³ John H. McCray, "The Magnificence of Clarendon's Folk," *Lighthouse and Informer*, Sept. 20, 1952, 4.

³⁴⁴ John H. McCray, "Who was Fooling Whom Last Year?" *Lighthouse and Informer*, Nov. 1, 1951, 4.

the papers paid little attention to the case as it wound its way to the Supreme Court. Nonetheless, as 1954 began, the state's governor, its press, and its people waited nervously for the justices to issue their ruling in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*.

CHAPTER 6

THE *NEWS AND COURIER* AND INTERPOSITION

On May 22, 1954, the *Lighthouse and Informer* celebrated the US Supreme Court's ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* with its usual feistiness. The paper's lead editorial cheered the court's rejection of "the lying, moth-eaten 'separate but equal' chicanery," a system of education that had "persisted in the perennial stealing from Negro children." The newspaper ridiculed John W. Davis, the "fabulously-priced" lawyer hired by Governor James F. Byrnes to defend segregation on behalf of the state. The "blubbering" Davis may have been famous, the newspaper claimed, but he was no match for the "the legal prowess" of Thurgood Marshall and the NAACP. Most of all, the black newspaper emphasized the connection between the *Brown* ruling and what it saw as the nation's deep-seated desire to fulfill its democratic ideals. By rebuking Byrnes and the white South, the *Lighthouse and Informer* declared, the justices had restored faith in "the sense of American justice and fair play, and the ultimate triumph of right."³⁴⁵

The tone of the editorial may have been vintage *Lighthouse and Informer*, but South Carolina's leading black newspaper had undergone a change. The name of its founder and long-time editor, John H. McCray, no longer graced the masthead. McCray had left two months earlier to take a job as South Carolina correspondent for the Baltimore *Afro-American*. Always teetering on the brink of financial collapse, the

³⁴⁵ "Legally Enforced School Segregation Dealt Lethal Blow," *Lighthouse and Informer*, May 22, 1954, 4.

Lighthouse and Informer had slipped into bankruptcy in 1954, and the economic struggle had opened a rift between McCray and the paper's primary benefactor, civil rights activist Modjeska Simkins. Thirteen years earlier, the two had hatched a plan to move the paper to Columbia and create a "fighting organ" that would mobilize African Americans and jump-start the state's civil rights movement. Now, just weeks after that movement's greatest legal triumph, the paper fell silent for good. In the fall of 1954, the *Lighthouse and Informer* was shuttered and its press sold for \$638 to cover back taxes.³⁴⁶

The civil rights struggle in South Carolina suffered a major setback with the collapse of McCray's newspaper. Its demise left only one other black newspaper in the state, the *Palmetto Leader*, a weekly founded in 1919 by Republican attorney Nathaniel Frederick. Once a strong voice for black rights, the newspaper cut back on political coverage during the Depression, and with Frederick's death in 1938, the *Palmetto Leader* devolved into a religious and society paper that avoided civil rights issues altogether.³⁴⁷ Despite the death of the *Lighthouse and Informer*, McCray hoped to continue serving as one of the movement's chief public figures. He planned to write columns on South Carolina issues for the *Afro-American*, and the Progressive Democratic Party, the political organization he helped found, would continue to register black voters and speak out against attempts to deny African Americans the franchise. But those efforts could not replace the loss of a statewide newspaper devoted to black political activism.

³⁴⁶ John H. McCray oral history interview with Patricia Sullivan, April 1985, transcript in author's possession; William D. Workman, Jr., "Tax Sale Will Mark the End of *Lighthouse and Informer*," *Charleston News and Courier*, Feb. 5, 1955.

³⁴⁷ Hemmingway, "The Black Press in South Carolina," 163-181; William D. Workman, Jr., "Tax Sale Will Mark the End of *Lighthouse and Informer*," *Charleston News and Courier*, Feb. 5, 1955, 1B.

McCray's newspaper had been instrumental in uniting the black community in South Carolina. Each week for nearly thirteen years, the latest edition of the *Lighthouse and Informer* had served as part cheerleader and part commissar for a black community that was still uncertain about its place in civic life. Through the pages of the newspaper, McCray and his allies in the NAACP had challenged white claims about black inferiority and delivered their own interpretation of what white supremacist rule meant for American democracy. The newspaper had defined American citizenship as an act of self-assertion, a right earned by those who were willing to demand it. Through repeated appeals to the "American way," "the American sense of justice," and "the American tradition of fair play," McCray and his colleagues linked the black community's demand for equal rights to nation's most cherished democratic ideals. In doing so, the *Lighthouse and Informer* helped develop a united black counterpublic in South Carolina that was capable of undermining white efforts to depict the "southern custom" of racial segregation as the "natural order" envisioned by the founding fathers. By joining the debate so aggressively, the newspaper helped the black freedom movement in South Carolina break down the barrier that white supremacy had erected to prevent their arguments from being heard in the South and the North. At the same time, McCray and his associates at the *Lighthouse and Informer* had prowled the black public sphere in search of backsliders who instilled fear in the community. They used the paper to ridicule and ostracize fellow African Americans who believed blacks were moving too quickly, or who hoped to win white favor by undermining the movement.

In Charleston, the *News and Courier* appeared to represent everything the *Lighthouse and Informer* was fighting against. The paper believed that the "southern

custom” of racial separation *was* the “natural order,” and it described the *Brown* ruling as an attack on the American system of government. In a front-page editorial, the *News and Courier* said the US Supreme Court decision “had cut deep into the sinews of the Republic.” By “depriving the states of the right to administer public education,” the justices had redefined the Constitution and destroyed the “balance” in race relations that had prevailed in South Carolina since the end of Reconstruction. The *News and Courier* conceded that it was “too late to secede and start another War Between the States,” and it urged white southerners to remain calm and not overreact, but the paper said it had no intention of accepting racial integration in the South.³⁴⁸

The competing interpretations of the *Brown* decision delivered by the *News and Courier* and the *Lighthouse and Informer* foreshadowed the interpretive battles to come in the state and national civil spheres. More than a legal victory, the *Brown* ruling represented a fundamental shift in the culture of the northern civil sphere. The unanimous opinion signaled how far the intellectual credibility of overt racism had fallen over the past decade. In declaring that segregated schools were inherently unequal and illegal, the justices had not only overturned the separate but equal doctrine of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, they established institutional support for the notion that African Americans were full-fledged members of the solidary that comprised the nation’s civil sphere. In this sense, *Brown* served as an act of civic repair intended to heal a wound that had been festering at the heart of American democracy. Yet the issue of black equality was far from settled. Racial conservatives like those at the *News and Courier* would move to resist implementation of the *Brown* ruling. More importantly, they took the lead in the effort to

³⁴⁸ “The Court’s Decision,” *Charleston News and Courier*, May 18, 1954, 1.

delegitimize the ruling in the regional and national civil spheres before its egalitarian ethos could harden into an established and accepted reality as the cultural law of the land.

Despite its harsh rhetoric on civil rights, the *News and Courier* had always maintained a surprisingly hospitable relationship with McCray and his newspaper. McCray had claimed that the *News and Courier's* legendary editor, William Watts Ball, had inspired him to launch his first paper, the *Charleston Lighthouse*. McCray said he gone to the *News and Courier* offices in the mid-1930s to complain about some long-forgotten editorial policy. Ball had refused to budge on the issue, but he had suggested the black community start its own newspaper.³⁴⁹ Over the years, Ball and McCray occasionally traded letters and phone calls, usually about some political issue involving African Americans.³⁵⁰ After the *Lighthouse and Informer* shut down, the *News and Courier's* Columbia correspondent, William D. Workman, Jr., wrote a lengthy obituary. Although mostly objective in tone, the story appeared sympathetic at times. Workman noted McCray's "blunt editorials" had made the *Lighthouse and Informer* a "controversial element in the state's political life," but he accurately reported on the paper's role in fighting for "Negro participation in Democratic primaries, desegregation of public schools, and expansion of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People." Workman's story described the three goals McCray had set when he launched the newspaper: to provide a medium for Negro expression, to encourage Negro voting, and to enhance Negro education. Workman acknowledged that McCray "takes satisfaction in his conviction" that the newspaper helped South Carolina's black

³⁴⁹ Workman, "Tax Sale Will Mark End of Lighthouse and Informer"; John H. McCray, "The Way Things Were," *Charleston Chronicle*, January 19, 1981.

³⁵⁰ "Won't Try That Again," *Lighthouse and Informer*, July 9, 1943, 4.

community move closer to achieving those goals.³⁵¹ McCray was pleased with the way the *News and Courier* had treated his newspaper, and he wrote to Workman to thank him for his “excellent reporting and analysis.” The article may have been “just another routine piece of copy for you,” McCray said, but it had been “done up in a most interesting and conclusive way.”³⁵²

Workman’s news report on the demise of the *Lighthouse and Informer* reflected the *News and Courier*’s complicated political views. Throughout its existence, the Charleston newspaper had often been as concerned about class as it was about race. The *News and Courier* had always claimed that it supported African American advancement, as long as that progress did not challenge white aristocratic rule. The newspaper believed the better class of whites should run the state in a way that retained political control over blacks and working-class whites, but allowed certain gifted members of both of those groups to lift themselves up if possible. In this sense, McCray’s goal of creating a newspaper that would “enhance Negro education” fit nicely within the *News and Courier*’s paternalistic worldview. In its reaction to the *Brown* decision, the *News and Courier* acknowledged that “Negroes have become more insistent on asserting themselves,” and said it “recognizes their rights and ambitions.” But like almost all of the southern white press, the Charleston newspaper remained unwilling to accept how widespread the black demand for true equality had become. Instead, it appeared to harken back to the days of Booker T. Washington and industrial education with its call for “advancement for the Negroes both as manpower for the fields and factories as well as

³⁵¹ Workman, “Tax Sale Will Mark End of *Lighthouse and Informer*.”

³⁵² John H. McCray to William D. Workman, February 7, 1955. WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Correspondence, 1951-1956.

customers in the stores.” Such economic progress, the paper claimed, would restore racial harmony and “remove many of the social frictions which chafe both races.”³⁵³

In its response to *Brown*, the *News and Courier* hit many of the same paternalistic notes that Ball had been singing since he arrived at the Charleston paper in 1927. But the *News and Courier* was not the same paper. Like the *Lighthouse and Informer*, it too had undergone a major change on its masthead. Ball had retired at the end of 1950 and passed away in 1952. He was replaced by his long-time managing editor, Thomas R. Waring, Jr., a familiar name in Charleston society. Waring’s father had been editor of the city’s afternoon newspaper, the *Charleston Evening Post*. And, in a particularly southern, small-town twist to the story, Waring’s uncle was J. Waites Waring, the federal judge whose rulings in favor of the NAACP had made him a despised man in white Charleston. Judge Waring had overturned the all-white Democratic Party primary system in the state of South Carolina in 1947, and he had filed a dissent in 1952 that had foreshadowed the eventual ruling against school segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*. As a child, the editor had been fond of his uncle. But as an adult, Thomas Waring Jr. had embraced William Watts Ball as his intellectual and professional mentor. Like Ball, the editor believed the South’s custom of racial separation had evolved naturally as a means to protect civilization. Despite growing evidence to the contrary, he claimed the majority of both races supported segregation, and thus the federal effort to overturn it was an attack on the nation’s democratic values. Judge Waring, in his famous dissent in *Briggs v. Elliott*, the Clarendon County case that would eventually be rolled into *Brown*, had said just the opposite. He argued that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal – he

³⁵³ “The Court’s Decision,” *Charleston News and Courier*, May 18, 1954, 1.

called them “evil” – and thus state-enforced segregation deprived black children of their constitutional right to equal protection under the law. When the US Supreme Court sided unanimously with his uncle, Thomas Waring did what *News and Courier* editors had always done – he led his newspaper deep into the political battle.

In its report on the collapse of McCray’s *Lighthouse and Informer*, the *News and Courier* had noted that McCray, as editor of the black newspaper and founder of the Progressive Democratic Party, had “become embroiled in politics as well as journalism.” The Charleston newspaper could have been describing its own situation at the time. In much the same way that McCray had founded the *Lighthouse and Informer* to further the civil rights movement, Waring and Workman used the *News and Courier* to help push their political aims in the white community. McCray’s dual role as journalist and political activist had been a given. Black newspapers had always served as advocates for their race; their journalists were expected to engage directly in political activism.³⁵⁴ In the years after the *Brown* decision, Waring and Workman would play the same dual role at one of South Carolina’s leading white newspapers. In addition to covering the news, they would work behind the scenes to help shape the white community’s “massive resistance” to the *Brown* ruling and to the larger push for black equality. They would help craft the “interposition” strategy to block integration of state schools, help establish the white citizens’ council movement in South Carolina, and launch a campaign to break through the so-called “paper curtain” that they believed prevented northerners from hearing the white southern point of view. By the late 1950s, when those efforts appeared to be failing

³⁵⁴ See, for example: Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voices of Freedom*.

to halt black progress toward full equality, they would play central roles in building a new political home for white southerners in a revamped Republican Party.

Such direct political activism on the part of white southern journalists was hardly unprecedented. In 1954, for example, the liberal editor of the *Little Rock Gazette*, Harry Ashmore, had written a key speech late in the campaign to help gubernatorial candidate Orville Faubus win the Democratic Party primary. It was a bit of political engagement that Ashmore would come to regret. Three years later, Faubus surprised the liberal editor by blocking nine black students from integrating Little Rock's Central High School, a stand that triggered a constitutional crisis and forced President Eisenhower to send federal troops to Arkansas to enforce the *Brown* ruling.³⁵⁵ At the same time, James J. Kilpatrick, the editor of the *Richmond News Leader*, had joined Virginia's senior US senator, Harry Byrd, in leading the fight against the civil rights movement in that state.³⁵⁶

In South Carolina, editors at the *News and Courier* had always engaged openly and directly in political activism. When Waring and Workman joined the paper as a young journalist in the 1930s, William Watts Ball supported political candidates in news stories and opinion pieces, and he often consulted with their campaigns on strategy.³⁵⁷ Ball seemed to be a throwback to the nineteenth century, when powerful editors such as Horace Greely, Thurlow Weed and the *News and Courier*'s Francis Dawson frequently

³⁵⁵ Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 144-145.

³⁵⁶ William P. Hustwit, *James K. Kilpatrick, Salesman for Segregation* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 2013); Ronald L. Heinman, *Harry Byrd of Virginia* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 1996).

³⁵⁷ Stark, *Damned Upcountryman*, " 61-81, 115-197.

used their newspapers to promote political ambitions.³⁵⁸ By the early 1950s, when Waring and Workman emerged as political figures, the *News and Courier's* top journalists continued to pursue political goals. Yet unlike their predecessors, Waring and Workman began to struggle with the conflict created by their dual roles.

Mainstream American journalism had shed its openly partisan roots and slowly embraced the concepts of independence and impartiality in the years between 1880 and the 1920s. Before the Civil War, most American newspapers depended on political parties for financial support; they delivered a partisan message in return for a party subsidy.³⁵⁹ In the postbellum years, however, journalism gradually grew into a business and a profession.³⁶⁰ With the rise of the industrial revolution, cities grew, the reading public expanded, and metropolitan newspapers prospered. New technology cut the cost of printing, and newspapers took advantage of an increased demand for advertising. At the same time, readers began demanding more facts and less partisan opinion. To meet that demand, newspapers hired more reporters to gather hard news.³⁶¹ They no longer regarded themselves as political organs but as businesses that supplied the public with a broad range of information.³⁶²

³⁵⁸ Hazel Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 31.

³⁵⁹ The “penny press” was one glaring exception. As Michael Schudson has argued, “penny press” editors such as James Gordon Bennett, Sr., published newspapers that were independent of political parties and produced some of the first hard news reporting. See: Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), 14-57.

³⁶⁰ See, in particular: Baldasty, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century*.

³⁶¹ Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865-1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 107-111.

³⁶² Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*, 224.

By the 1880s, newspapers had begun cutting their ties to political parties. This move toward independence advanced in fits and starts. But after the divisive election of 1896, when populist leader William Jennings Bryan split the Democrats and the party suffered a disastrous setback, newspapers turned sharply away from overt party connections.³⁶³ Michael McGerr contends that independent journalism grew naturally out of the progressive reform movement of the late 1800s. The reformers were educated elites who placed their faith in social science and empirical evidence. They were appalled by the corruption and the emotionalism of machine politics. The reformers believed voters should be educated with facts, not inundated with opinion. The independent newspapers followed suit: They printed more straight news, exiled opinion journalism to the editorial page, and began to articulate the new norms of modern, independent journalism.³⁶⁴ An independent newspaper, one editor declared, should always put “fact before opinion, proof before inference, principle before partisanship.”³⁶⁵

By the 1920s, the principles of independence and detachment were firmly established as the dominant paradigm in modern American journalism.³⁶⁶ Universities launched journalism schools to teach students the techniques of modern reporting, and journalists created professional associations such as the American Society of Newspaper

³⁶³ Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press*, 16; McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 111; Kaplan, “From Partisanship to Professionalism: The Transformation of the Daily Press.”

³⁶⁴ McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics*, 118-120.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 118.

³⁶⁶ In addition to McGerr, Kaplan, and Schudson, see also: W. Joseph Campbell, *The Year that Defined Modern Journalism, 1897 and the Clash of Paradigms* (New York: Routledge, 2006); David T.Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How “Objectivity” Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

Editors (ASNE).³⁶⁷ In 1923, the ASNE established its “Canons of Journalism,” which maintained that news reporting should be impartial and newspapers should be free of all obligations except “fidelity to the public interest.”³⁶⁸ Historians and media scholars have analyzed the implications of the professionalization of the press.³⁶⁹ In Patricia Dooley’s view, journalists were assuming the task of “a different breed of political communicator, one who, unlike politicians, would not put political ambition and partisan creed above the needs of the more general public.”³⁷⁰ Mainstream American journalism began to adopt what media theorists have described as the “monitorial” role in the democratic process.³⁷¹ Journalists would provide neutral and objective reporting, and allow some interpretation, but their role prohibited partisan advocacy or direct involvement in political activism.³⁷² As Borden and Pritchard contend, society began to expect journalists to carry out their

³⁶⁷ Paul Afred Pratte, *Gods Within the Machine: A History of the American Society of Newspaper Editors* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 1995), 37; Tom Dickson, *Mass Media Education in Transition* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associations, 2000), 8-25.

³⁶⁸ The original canons can be found in the appendix of: Nelson Antrim Crawford, *The Ethics of Journalism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1924, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1969; the ASNE updated the 1923 canons of journalism in 1975. See http://asne.org/Article_View/ArticleId/325/ASNEs-Statement-of-Principles.aspx (accessed 6/11/2012).

³⁶⁹ Patricia L. Dooley, *Taking Their Political Place: Journalists and the Making of an Occupation* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997, 2000), 80-87; Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*, 51-62; Randall Collins, “Changing Conceptions in the Sociology of the Professions,” in *The Formation of Professions: Knowledge, State and Strategy*, eds. Rolf Torstendahl and Michael Burrage (London: Sage, 1990), 11-24; Daniel C. Hallin and Paola Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33-34.

³⁷⁰ Dooley, *Taking Their Political Place*, 82.

³⁷¹ Clifford G. Christians, Theodore L. Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng, and Robert A. White, *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 115-116, 125.

³⁷² Christians, et al., 125.

“essential function” as purveyors of unbiased political information without violating the public trust or concealing any conflicts of interest.³⁷³

Nudged along by intellectuals like Walter Lippmann, newspaper editors also began to articulate the concept of “objective” news reporting.³⁷⁴ Michael Schudson says that the notion of objectivity – the separation of “facts” from “values” – rested in part on the post-World War I belief that scientific inquiry was the only path to truth given the complexity of the modern world.³⁷⁵ But the rise of objectivity had a political component as well. Richard L. Kaplan maintains the claim of objectivity became a sort of cover that granted journalists a significant voice in political discourse without forcing them to embrace a partisan point of view. To justify their editorial decisions, journalists “elaborated an occupational ethic” that granted them sweeping authority to serve as arbiters in the public sphere.³⁷⁶ Newspapers that aspired to join the mainstream of American journalism embraced independence, detachment, and objectivity. But these standards did not halt political advocacy entirely. They merely pushed it into the shadows. As Schudson put it, “political advocacy could increasingly be maintained only sub rosa and in tension with the norms of professionalism.”³⁷⁷

³⁷³ Borden and Pritchard, “Conflict of Interest in Journalism,” 73-91.

³⁷⁴ See, for example, Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1922).

³⁷⁵ Schudson, *Discovering the News*, 121-123.

³⁷⁶ Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press*, 111.

³⁷⁷ Michael Schudson, “Persistence of Vision – Partisan Journalism in the Mainstream Press,” in *A History of the Book in America, Volume 4, Print in Motion, The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, eds., Carl F. Kaestle and Janice Radway (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 141.

The new professional standards would spread unevenly across the country. And even where they were accepted, they were not always followed.³⁷⁸ A few recent studies suggest that partisan activism survived in the twentieth-century press.³⁷⁹ Historians have offered different explanations for this contradiction. Kaplan argues journalists embraced the notion of impartiality to maintain public authority, but found that their “apolitical ethic” failed to enhance political discourse.³⁸⁰ Robert McChesney asserts that the professionalization of journalism merely created the appearance of neutrality to justify consolidation of the press.³⁸¹ Hazel Dicken-Garcia maintains that journalists failed during the professionalization process to resolve clearly and definitively the issue of the proper role for the press to play in politics.³⁸² Yet by the 1950s, most larger newspapers in the United States felt the need to articulate the new standards, even if they ignored them. The

³⁷⁸ For an extreme example, see how the Chandler family’s *Los Angeles Times* supported the Republican Party. David Halberstam, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Knopf, 1979), 112-122; Also, see the way publisher Eugene Pulliam’s *Arizona Republic* used its news pages on behalf of Workman’s hero, Sen. Barry Goldwater. Rick Perlstein, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), 40; Also, see the dispute over whether Walter Cronkite, an icon of impartial journalism, secretly encouraged Robert Kennedy to run for the presidency as an anti-Vietnam War candidate, then later interviewed Kennedy about his political plans. Douglas Brinkley, *Cronkite* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), 389-392; Louis Menand, “Seeing It Now: Walter Cronkite and the Legend of CBS News,” *The New Yorker*, 9 July 2012, 88-94.

³⁷⁹ Richard L Kaplan, “From Partisanship to Professionalism: The Transformation of the Daily Press,” in *A History of the Book in America: Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 116-139; Michael Schudson, “Persistence of Vision – Partisan Journalism in the Mainstream Press,” in *A History of the Book in America: Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*, eds. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 140-150.

³⁸⁰; Kaplan, “From Partisanship to Professionalism,” 139.

³⁸¹ Robert W. McChesney, *The Problem of the Media: U.S. Communication Politics of the 21st Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 61-77.

³⁸² Dicken-Garcia, *Journalistic Standards in Nineteenth-Century America*, 32.

ethical rules were especially murky for editorial writers and columnists, and some opinion journalists have claimed they should participate directly in politics, despite the spread of professional codes that denounced such activities.³⁸³ Opinion and interpretations did have acknowledged places in the press, Schudson observes, but journalists also helped politicians behind the scenes with advice, speech writing, and other forms of support.³⁸⁴

Journalism historians have generally accepted the view that a professionalized, independent, and nonpartisan daily press had emerged by the mid-twentieth century in the United States. This accepted narrative of journalism history contends that the overwhelming majority of mainstream news outlets embraced the “monitorial” role, which emphasized a strict separation between journalism and partisan political activism.³⁸⁵ Yet this study of South Carolina’s white press and its role in resisting black equality raises new questions about how this professionalization process unfolded. Specifically, this study reveals a deep and ongoing connection between press and partisan politics in the state, one that would have a significant impact on national political

³⁸³ Schudson, “Persistence of Vision,” 146-150; For examples of codes of conduct governing editorial writers and columnists, see Conrad C. Fink, *Writing Opinion for Impact*, 2nd Ed. (Ames, IA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 7-10. The National Conference of Editorial Writers Basic Statement of Principles stated: “The writer should be constantly alert to conflicts of interest, real or apparent, including those that may arise from financial holdings, secondary employment, holding public office, or involvement in political, civic, or other organizations.” Despite such codes, evidence that rules remained murky for opinion journalists can be found in the dispute over George Will’s involvement in debate preparation for presidential candidate Ronald Reagan in 1980. See “Comment: Where There’s a Will There’s a Way, *Columbia Journalism Review*, 1 September, 1983, 25. Adding to the confusion over the role of opinion journalism is the existence of advocacy journalists who wrote for such journals as *The Nation*, *The National Review*, the alternative and minority press, and other publications of opinion and advocacy.

³⁸⁴ Schudson, “Persistence of Vision,” 146-148.

³⁸⁵ See: Christians, et al., 125, Kaplan, “From Partisanship to Professionalism,” 134-135.

development during and after the civil rights movement. Yet it also shows how partisan journalists had begun to hide their activism from the public to maintain their status as independent sources of information and interpretation. The evidence from South Carolina suggests the professionalization narrative that has grown so prominent in journalism history deserves closer scrutiny.

With few large cities to support robust journalism, the South was especially slow to embrace the new professionalized journalism and its norms of impartiality and objectivity. In the years after World War II, as the region grew more prosperous, more urban, and more connected to the rest of the nation, the region's journalists began to accept these new rules of journalism – at least in public. Increasingly across the 1950s, Waring and Workman presented the *News and Courier* as a professional news operation that embodied the ethical standards articulated by organizations such as the American Society of Newspaper Editors.³⁸⁶ Despite their deep engagement in political causes, the two Charleston journalists proclaimed their newspaper's commitment to independence, objectivity, and nonpartisanship in news coverage.

Both Workman and Waring had apprenticed under Ball, the paper's editor from 1927 to 1951.³⁸⁷ After his death in 1952, the *New York Times* called Ball “the last of the great editor personalities.”³⁸⁸ Ball had no doubt about the role newspapers editors should play in their communities. He believed they had a civic obligation to lead their

³⁸⁶ Crawford, *The Ethics of Journalism*, appendix. See also, Pratte, *Gods Within the Machine*, 37.

³⁸⁷ Workman kept a picture of “Dr. Ball” on his office wall in Columbia. See William D. Workman to Thomas R. Waring, 6 December 1961, Thomas R. Waring Papers, Correspondence: William D. Workman, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina (hereafter cited as TRW Papers).

³⁸⁸ Stark, *Damned Upcountryman*, 8.

communities and engage fully in politics.³⁸⁹ Waring served Ball loyally as city editor and then as managing editor for two decades. Unlike his mentor, however, Waring had spent significant time working outside South Carolina. He graduated from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, and spent two years at the *New York Herald-Tribune*, where another southerner, the well-known city editor Stanley Walker of Texas, sharpened his reporting and writing skills.³⁹⁰ After taking over as editor of the *News and Courier* on New Year's Day in 1951, Waring emerged as a respected member of the national journalistic community. The Charleston editor served on key editorial committees of both the Associated Press and the ASNE.³⁹¹ ASNE colleagues asked him to serve as co-chairman of the Southern Education Reporting Service, an organization created to supply newspapers with impartial news coverage of southern schools in the wake of the *Brown v. Board Education* ruling.³⁹² James Reston of the *New York Times*, perhaps the nation's

³⁸⁹ As editor of *The State* from 1913 to 1923, Ball helped organize and lead the opposition to Cole Blease, the populist who served two terms as governor of South Carolina but lost his US Senate bid in 1914. In addition to his editorial support, Ball helped the anti-Blease faction of the Democratic Party select candidates to oppose Blease in the primaries, and he advised those candidates on strategy. Ball was asked to run for office several times, but declined. Later, as editor of the *News and Courier*, Ball worked behind the scenes to launch an anti-FDR candidate at the 1944 Democratic National Convention. He served as an informal adviser to Strom Thurmond's "Dixiecrat" presidential campaign in 1948. Ball often referred to his political participation in his editorials. See Stark, *Damned Upcountryman*, 61-81, 153-197.

³⁹⁰ See Charles R. Rowe, "Pages of History: 200 Years at the *Post and Courier*: The Waring Years," *Charleston Post and Courier*, 10 January 2003. For more on Walker, see: Stanley Walker, *City Editor* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1934).

³⁹¹ Waring started serving on Associated Press committees when he was managing editor in the late 1940s. See TRW Papers: Correspondence: Associated Press. He was on the ASNE membership committee from 1958 through 1965. See TRW Papers: Correspondence: American Society of Newspaper Editors, SCHS. Both the AP and ASNE had codes of ethics proclaiming their commitment to impartial news coverage.

³⁹² Cumming, "Facing Facts, Facing South," 145-155.

best-known political reporter of the era, called Waring “the most talented newspaperman in South Carolina.”³⁹³

Waring took steps to modernize the *News and Courier* and separate news reporting from editorial opinion. In one letter to the statehouse staff in 1951, for example, he warned his political reporters to “stick to the facts” and keep their stories impartial. He was especially pointed in his criticism of Workman, his star correspondent. Since 1947, Workman had been given the freedom to write occasional analytical pieces under the byline “editorial correspondent,” but Waring thought Workman was abusing this privilege. “Frankly, your copy has slipped,” Waring wrote. The new editor chastised his lead reporter for writing too many soft pieces filled with own opinion instead of “the hard-hitting, original stories from all over the state” that had made his reputation.³⁹⁴ Unlike Ball, Waring wanted the respect of his peers in the national press, and by the mid-1950s, that demanded at least superficial adherence to the professional norms of independence, impartiality and objectivity.

The Supreme Court’s unanimous decision in the *Brown* case would test Waring’s commitment to the new norms of professional journalism. The initial ruling in May 1954 had triggered a torrent of rhetoric from white southerners but a surprisingly timid political response, with little in the way of organized opposition. When the justices returned the following spring with their second *Brown* decision – the so-called Brown II ruling, which addressed the question of an integration timetable – white resistance

³⁹³ James Reston, “How They Fight Elections in South Carolina,” *The New York Times*, 19 October 1962.

³⁹⁴ Waring’s letter shortly after becoming editor severely chastised his statehouse reporters for injecting opinion into their reporting. Waring to Workman, 29 January 1951, TRW Papers: Correspondence, William D. Workman.

movements began to emerge. The court's decision in *Brown II* had appeared to be a victory for the white South. The justices set no hard date by which integration had to occur, and the vague wording of their order – “with all deliberate speed” – appeared to give local school districts wide latitude to end school segregation at their own pace. By the summer of 1955, however, white segregationists were in no mood to be appeased.³⁹⁵

In South Carolina, a group of whites citizens from around the state gathered in Columbia's Roosevelt Hotel on July 20, 1955, to plot their response. Workman and Waring had helped organize the meeting, working closely with two businessmen, Robert Davis of Columbia and Farley Smith of Lynchburg.³⁹⁶ Smith was the son of former US Senator “Cotton” Ed Smith, the man who had famously walked out of the 1936 Democratic Convention in Philadelphia to protest the presence of a black minister who was invited to deliver the benediction.³⁹⁷ On the editorial page, the *News and Courier* described the committee as “a cross-section of the better-class moderate white people” who were the state's “leaders in law, clergy, farming, business, education and politics.”³⁹⁸ The group eventually took its name from the number of those who participated. They called themselves the Committee of 52.

During that first meeting, Workman was appointed to a steering committee that was assigned the job of writing a resolution that would be published statewide and

³⁹⁵ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 67-68.

³⁹⁶ Robert S. Davis to Farley Smith, July 9, 1955, WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Committee of 52, 1955.

³⁹⁷ Senator “Cotton” Ed Smith's “Philydelphy” story was a staple of the 1938 campaign, when he overcame FDR's effort to purge him from the Democratic Party and won re-election in a landslide. See, for example: Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*, 507; Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks*, 70.

³⁹⁸ “Manifesto of Southern Rights,” *Charleston News and Courier*, August 19, 1955, 16A.

delivered to the legislature. Workman wrote several drafts that were distributed to other steering committee members for edits and comments.³⁹⁹ The final version would come to be known as the “interposition” resolution, and it would serve as a concise summary of the arguments that would dominate southern white rhetoric during the coming years of “massive resistance.” The document declared that a “clear and present danger” threatened the nation’s constitutional form of government. It claimed the US Supreme Court had trampled on the Tenth Amendment, which reserved to the states all rights not specifically delegated to the federal government. The justices had ignored established legal precedent, the resolution contended, and had based their *Brown* decision on the “dubious conclusions of sociologists and psychologists whose number includes persons tainted by Communism.” Workman’s resolution also noted the shift in northern public opinion, which it blamed on the “pressure and propaganda” applied by the NAACP and other “self-serving organizations.” Their efforts had sapped the will of politicians and the general public to “resist encroachments” upon the constitutional rights of the states.

The Committee of 52 called on the South Carolina General Assembly to “maintain the sovereignty guaranteed to it by the constitution.” To accomplish that, state lawmakers must “interpose the sovereignty of the State of South Carolina between Federal Courts and local school officials” to halt school integration.⁴⁰⁰ Workman would later take pride in the fact that he had proposed use of the legal strategy of

³⁹⁹ Early drafts of the documents can found in WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Committee of 52, 1955. See also: Alva Lumpkin to William D. Workman, Jr., July 13, 1955, WDW Papers: Civil Rights: Committee of 52, 1955.

⁴⁰⁰ A draft and the final version of the Committee of 52 resolution are available in the Workman papers: WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Committee of 52, 1955. The resolution also appeared in the *Charleston News and Courier*, *The State*, and other South Carolina newspapers on August 18, 1955.

“interposition” before Kilpatrick, the Richmond editor who made the concept famous during Virginia’s battle over school integration. In an exchange of letters, Kilpatrick conceded the point, noting Workman was “in the field three months” before Kilpatrick began using the term publicly.⁴⁰¹

On August 17, when the Committee of 52 published its resolution as an advertisement in white newspapers across the state, Workman’s name appeared as one of the document’s signatories.⁴⁰² But his editor’s name did not. Waring had attended the initial meeting and commented on drafts of the resolution. But he said that, as a professional journalist, he could not sign it. In a letter to one of the committee’s organizers, Waring said he preferred to “leave the newspaper free to comment without ties of any kind.” Waring said he had told organizers that he would attend the committee’s meetings “as a newspaper editor,” not as a participant. The *News and Courier* “will continue to hammer in its editorials at the matters treated by the resolution,” Waring said, but will retain its independence and reserve the right to “suggest shadings, changes or different strategic approaches” if necessary.⁴⁰³

Waring copied Workman on his letter, and not long after, Workman changed his official status on the committee as well. In a letter to a committee organizer, Workman asked to be “relieved of his assignment” and removed from the group’s steering committee. He said he based his request on “considerations which arise from my

⁴⁰¹ William D. Workman, Jr. to James J. Kilpatrick, April 22, 1957; James J. Kilpatrick to William D. Workman, April 24, 1957. WDW Papers: Correspondence, 1957.

⁴⁰² Associated Press, “Citizens Urge State Action in Race Issue,” *The State*, August 18, 1955, 1.

⁴⁰³ T.R. Waring to Col. James F. Risher. July 27, 1955. WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Committee of 52.

profession.” Workman said he was “unwilling to be an active participant in an organization which engages in developments which I, as a newsman, must report.” By the time Workman wrote his letter of resignation, the *News and Courier* had already published two news reports on the Committee of 52, one under the byline: W.D. Workman, Jr., Capital Correspondent.⁴⁰⁴ Workman’s letter concluded by saying, “I do not consider it proper to be at once ‘inside’ an organization as a member and ‘outside’ as a reporter.”⁴⁰⁵

As the decade wore on, Workman would frequently struggle with the contradiction between his verbal commitments to the standards of professionalized journalism and his deep desire to engage in the white resistance to the civil rights movement. As was the case with the Committee of 52, it appeared to be Waring who demanded *News and Courier* journalists follow the new professional standards, in word and appearance if not in deed.

The Committee of 52 published its resolution in newspapers across the state under the headline “Put Yourself on Record.” Within a week, more than 7,000 readers had returned signed copies of the document, a show of support that Waring’s newspaper hailed as a major victory for the white resistance movement. “If enough of us stand with the 52 no South Carolina politician will ever weaken in the face of pressure from the NAACP,” the *News and Courier* said. “Neither the Supreme Court nor any other body

⁴⁰⁴ W.D. Workman, Jr., “Citizens Urge State Action in Race Issue,” *Charleston News and Courier*, Aug. 19, 1955, B1; W.D. Workman, Jr., “State’s Committee of 52 Votes to Continue Its Existence and Effort to Gain Public Support,” *Charleston News and Courier*, September 8, 1955, B1.

⁴⁰⁵ W.D. Workman, Jr. to Ellison D. Smith, Jr., November 1, 1955, WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Committee of 52, 1955.

can jail us all, if we insist on retaining our constitutional rights.”⁴⁰⁶ White newspapers around the state and region agreed. *The State* said “the fight to maintain segregation has stiffened” with the committee’s emergence. The *Savannah Morning News* called the South Carolina group “non-political in its motives, non-partisan in make-up, and objective in its approach.” The *Greenville News* said the committee “put into unmistakable words” the state’s commitment to resist the *Brown* decision. The *News* also praised the quality of the men involved. They had no ties to the Ku Klux Klan, the newspaper said, and “they aren’t even in the same category as the so-called citizens’ councils, which are an unknown quantity.”⁴⁰⁷

Yet the Committee of 52 would soon give way to the white citizens’ councils as the primary organizer of white resistance in South Carolina, and Waring and his newspaper would help expedite this transition. Waring had been in close communication with the founders of the Mississippi citizens’ council movement for the past year. Robert D. Patterson, a plantation manager in the Mississippi delta town of Indianola, had been worried about the future of segregation well before the *Brown* ruling. A World War II veteran and former Mississippi State football star, Patterson said he was driven to act after reading a pamphlet written by fellow Mississippian Tom P. Brady, a Yale-educated lawyer from the small town of Brookhaven. Like Workman’s Committee of 52 resolution, Brady’s pamphlet ran the gamut of white southern legal arguments against the *Brown* ruling. But it also reached back to the 1948 Dixiecrat campaign to revive harsher

⁴⁰⁶ “Manifesto of Southern Rights,” *Charleston News and Courier*, August 19, 1955, 16A.

⁴⁰⁷ “Press Supports ‘Committee of 52’s’ Stand,” *Charleston News and Courier*, August 25, 1955, 2B.

rhetoric concerning “amalgamation,” “mongrelization,” and white subjugation to a “mulatto” race in the South.⁴⁰⁸

Brady expanded *Black Monday* into a book in late 1954, and its final chapter detailed several proposed white responses to *Brown*. Some were outlandish, such as the creation of a forty-ninth state to house all African Americans. But one of Brady’s suggestions would gain traction across the South: the creation of “law-abiding” white resistance organizations in every southern state. These groups would be coordinated by a “National Federation of Sovereign States,” which would orchestrate southern defiance of federal integration efforts. Brady believed the federation could take the lead in disseminating “correct information” about the “imminent danger” posed by the *Brown* ruling and the civil rights movement. The local organizations would be open and transparent, Brady said. They would be composed of the best people and would eschew violence and intimidation. These organizations would be nothing “like those nefarious Ku Klux Klans.”⁴⁰⁹

Following Brady’s advice, Patterson convened a group of leading white citizens in his small town and formed the Indianola Citizens’ Council in July 1954. By the following summer, Patterson claimed more than 60,000 Mississippians had joined 215 white citizens’ councils across the state. As historian Neil McMillen has shown, the movement got a major boost from the Jackson newspapers, the *Clarion-Ledger* and

⁴⁰⁸ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1944-1964* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971, 1994), 15-31.

⁴⁰⁹ Tom P. Brady, *Black Monday* (Winoia, Miss.: Association of White Citizens’ Councils, 1955); A limited first edition, printed on the presses of the Brookhaven Leader, was published in June 1954; the original pamphlet was a reprint of a Brady address of the Daughters of the American Revolution in Mississippi.

Jackson Daily News, which served as virtual propaganda arms for the citizens' councils.⁴¹⁰ Brady's book and the newspapers in Jackson and Charleston were part of a communications network that circulated ideas and tactics that could be used in resisting *Brown*. In this sense, the white segregationists were creating their own counterpublic to gather resources for the fight against black equality. Considered part of the nation's mainstream culture just a few years earlier, these segregationists were now an out group battling the growing cultural consensus in support of *Brown* decision in the national civil sphere.

In South Carolina, Waring's editorial page had been urging southern politicians to take the lead in organizing a response since the first *Brown* ruling. By the summer of 1955, the editor had grown frustrated with their inaction. He feared the Ku Klux Klan, with its "terrible" reputation, would step into the vacuum and do the "white South immeasurable" harm in terms of public perception. "The Klan can hurt the aims of those of us who intend to stand up for states' rights – to stand up for them in the daylight and without benefit of bed sheets or masks," the *News and Courier* said.⁴¹¹ Waring and Workman had both been reading Brady's *Black Monday* and following the rise of the citizens' councils in Mississippi.⁴¹² Brady's call for a resistance movement that was devoted to protecting the "southern custom" of racial separation, yet also shunned the Klan, appealed to the *News and Courier* journalists.

Waring traveled to Mississippi in 1955 to meet with Patterson and other white citizens' council leaders, and he returned to South Carolina determined to launch the

⁴¹⁰ McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 25.

⁴¹¹ "Don't Want the Klan," *Charleston News and Courier*, August 16, 1955, 8A.

⁴¹² Copies of *Black Monday* can be found in the personal papers of Working and Waring.

movement in his home state. On September 14, the *News and Courier* published a short editorial posing a question: How should the people of South Carolina respond to the Supreme Court's ruling on segregation? "The people, white and colored, look to their political leaders for guidance," the editorial declared.⁴¹³ The next day, on the front page, Waring began answering that question. He launched a three-part series, datelined Jackson, Mississippi, that made the case for the white citizens' council movement as the proper outlet for white resistance to the black push for equality in the South. The councils were mobilizing "to guard both whites and Negroes," Waring argued. Their goal is to preserve segregation "from the assaults" of the NAACP and the federal government. Yet they are also "dedicated to protect the rank and file of Negroes from the wrath of ruffian white people who may resort to violence."⁴¹⁴ By the end of 1955, Waring had become a leading evangelist and recruiter for the white citizens' council movement across the Deep South.⁴¹⁵ Despite his public pronouncements in support of professionalized and independent journalism, he was becoming more engaged as a political organizer and activist.

In South Carolina, a small-town attorney who had helped defend Clarendon County from the NAACP lawsuit on school segregation helped organize South Carolina's first group of citizens' councils. In the weeks after the second *Brown* ruling, the state NAACP had moved beyond the Clarendon case and had begun filing complaints

⁴¹³ "Unanswered Questions," *Charleston News and Courier*, September 14, 1955

⁴¹⁴ Thomas R. Waring, "Mississippi Citizens' Councils Are Protecting Both Races," *Charleston News and Courier*, September 15, 1955, 1A.

⁴¹⁵ For example, Waring's three-part series on the citizens' council movement ran in full in *The Citizens' Council*, a newsletter distributed by the Association of Citizens' Councils of Mississippi. By the next year, Waring was contributing pieces for a newspaper launched by the national citizens' council organization.

challenging school segregation in other counties in the state. In response, S. Emory Rogers convened a meeting of white citizens in the Orangeburg County town of Elloree. In September, he asked Farley Smith and several other members of the Committee of 52 to meet to discuss strategy. By October, the Committee of 52 had been subsumed into the larger Association of Citizens' Councils of South Carolina. Once again, Workman would cover a political story in which he was deeply engaged personally. In July 1956, the *News and Courier* correspondent reported that between 25,000 and 40,000 South Carolinians had joined local citizens' councils.⁴¹⁶ As in Mississippi and the rest of the Deep South, the council movement was most active in the Black Belt region along the coastal plain in the eastern and southern portions of the state, where African American populations were largest and whites were most concerned about black political power.⁴¹⁷

Waring used the *News and Courier* to polish the image of the white citizens' councils. Since its inception, the council movement had struggled to present its members as upstanding and peaceful. Yet the specter of the Klan always lingered nearby. In Alabama, for example, *Montgomery Advertiser* editor Grover Hall Jr. described the citizens' councils as nothing more than "manicured Kluxers."⁴¹⁸ Waring tried to overcome these negative images by framing the councils as "patriots" who represented the best in the American democratic tradition. They were "private citizens," not politicians, and they had stepped forward only because their political leaders had failed to do so. They were "pillars of the community" – the sort of folks who run "the chamber of commerce and the community chest" and handle all the "civil chores in any town worthy

⁴¹⁶ W.D. Workman, *Charleston News and Courier*, July 1, 1956.

⁴¹⁷ McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 73-80.

⁴¹⁸ Doug Cumming, *The Southern Press: Literary Legacies and the Challenge of Modernity* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2009), 160.

of the name.” The council members had a single goal, Waring maintained. They wanted to protect their communities from an unconstitutional intrusion that threatened to destroy their civilized way of life. Waring said the citizens’ councils were committed to peaceful resistance, and he used the language of the nation’s democratic heritage to defend the white councils’ right to control the civil sphere. They “have no sympathy for the Ku Klux Klan or any order favoring violence,” Waring assured his readers. “They are in no sense architects of an American Fascist movement. Rather they are firm supporters of the Republican and Jeffersonian Democracy.”⁴¹⁹

Yet the actions of the Klan and the citizens’ councils often complicated the *News and Courier*’s effort to burnish the image of the state’s segregationist movement. Under grand wizard Thomas Hamilton, Klan groups had been active in the state since 1947, and the *Brown* ruling triggered new violence. In Florence, for example, Klan members drew national attention when they attacked the paper’s editor. But it was a combination of threats – violence from the Klan and an economic boycott led by white businesses – that eventually forced the editor to leave town. The publisher of the moderately liberal *Morning News*, John G. O’Dowd, had hired his son Jack to replace outgoing editor James Rogers, who had left the paper in 1953 to take a job with an agricultural firm. A graduate of The Citadel who had fought in Korea and worked in newspapers in Texas, Jack O’Dowd was hardly a radical.⁴²⁰ He believed the US Supreme Court was the law of the land, however, and when the *Brown* ruling came down, he urged the readers of the *Morning News* to accept it. “Segregation is ended in southern schools. This change is law

⁴¹⁹ Thomas R. Waring, “Private Citizens Formed Citizens Councils,” *Charleston News and Courier*, September 16, 1955, 1A.

⁴²⁰ Edgar, *South Carolina: A History*,” 721.

if not fact,” the *Morning News* declared the day after the *Brown* decision. “The Supreme Court has ruled that this system of school segregation is a violation of the constitution of these United States, and only a matter of months separates this decision from executed fact.”⁴²¹ The next day, O’Dowd emphasized that local opposition to *Brown* – no matter how widespread or emotional – would not alter the court’s decision. And the young editor concluded by actually praising the justices: “Since the court decided – without opposition – to end segregation, the court could just as well have included in its decision the date integration is to be completed.” Perhaps naively, he believed white southerners should appreciate the court’s restraint.⁴²²

After publishing those two editorials, Jack O’Dowd became a marked man in Florence. Hamilton’s Klan denounced him, and one night a group of men the editor believed were Klansmen chased after him, forcing him to take refuge in a friend’s apartment. But the attacks on the *Morning News* were not only physical. Local businesses with ties to the white citizens’ council withheld advertising in an orchestrated boycott that lasted nearly two years. In a failed effort to appease the public, the *Morning News* announced in the spring of 1956 that it would no longer offer editorial comment on racial matters. When *Time* magazine reported on the paper’s struggle and depicted Jack O’Dowd as a courageous voice for reason in his community, Waring’s *News and Courier* struck back. Waring’s editorial ridiculed the *Morning News*’ vow of silence on segregation as “a grandstand play” delivered with “choking voice,” and it accused *Time* of trying to make a martyr out of a newspaper “that had allowed public opinion to stop it

⁴²¹ “Now That the Court’s Decided, Where Do We Go From Here?” *Florence Morning News*, May 18, 1954, 4.

⁴²² “One Area for Appreciation,” *Florence Morning News*, May 19, 1954, 4.

from saying what it thinks – a newspaper which was fighting for what it said it believed was right, then quit in the face of pressure.”⁴²³

Three months after Waring’s editorial, in June of 1956, Jack O’Dowd left his father’s newspaper. Frightened for his son’s life, and with the *Morning News* facing economic collapse, the publisher asked his son to resign. The young journalist left Florence and took a job with the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Before leaving, however, Jack O’Dowd wrote a final editorial headlined “Retreat from Reason.” He claimed he had never supported forced integration in South Carolina, but he denounced the tactics and rhetoric of a pro-segregationist movement that tried to shut down all debate.⁴²⁴ In South Carolina politics, O’Dowd said after leaving the state, denunciations of the Supreme Court and the NAACP had replaced “home, mother, God, and country.”⁴²⁵

In Charleston, Waring’s *News and Courier* reported the departure of the Florence editor in a short news story that was notable for what was left out. The three-paragraph item made no mention of the *Brown* decision, the Klan attacks, the economic boycott, or O’Dowd’s parting-shot editorial. It simply said O’Dowd had “resigned to take a job in Chicago.”⁴²⁶ To replace his son, *Morning News* publisher John G. O’Dowd persuaded Rogers to return as editor, and he put an end to the boycott by quickly proclaiming the paper’s clear opposition to *Brown*. Segregation was not “an evil scheme” to deny the

⁴²³ “*Time* and Florence, *Charleston News and Courier*, March 30, 1956, 4.

⁴²⁴ “Retreat from Reason,” *Florence Morning News*, June, 1956, 4A.

⁴²⁵ As Quoted in Howard H. Quint, *Profile in Black and White: A Frank Portrait of South Carolina* (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1958), 99.

⁴²⁶ O’Dowd Resigns Editorial Post at Florence,” *Charleston News and Courier*, June 16, 1956, B1.

Negro his rights, Rogers wrote. Rather, it was a “high road” that would benefit both races “without tension or ill will.”⁴²⁷

The campaign against the *Florence Morning News* after the *Brown* editorial illustrated how the white resistance operated in 1950s South Carolina and throughout the South.⁴²⁸ The Klan and other extremist groups intimidated black and white supporters of integration with the use of force, while citizens’ councils and so-called “respectable” groups often threatened economic retribution. The white press often played a key role in the process. African Americans citizens who signed petitions demanding integrated schools would find their names published in the local white newspaper. Thus identified as a “troublemaker,” the black citizen would suddenly lose his job, or have his rent raised beyond his ability to pay.⁴²⁹ Such tactics did not fit with Waring’s framing of the council members as “Jeffersonian Democrats” who cherished American values of freedom and liberty. Waring conceded that segregationists used “economic pressure” such as the boycott against the *Morning News*, but he maintained these efforts were the work of individuals acting alone, not the citizens’ councils “acting as a group.”⁴³⁰ For the *News and Courier*, it was imperative to separate the citizens’ council movement from such anti-civil behavior.

Workman used his position as a news reporter to support the citizens’ council as well. In the *News and Courier*, he frequently reported on the growth of the councils and communicated with group leaders to discuss public relations strategy. At one point, he

⁴²⁷ James Rogers, “On This Positive Ground South Can Stake Case for Segregation,” *Florence Morning News*, August 5, 1956, 4.

⁴²⁸ See: McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council*, 73-85; Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 215-216.

⁴²⁹ See, for example, Lau, *Democracy Rising*, 215.

⁴³⁰ Waring, “Mississippi Citizens’ Councils Are Protecting Both Races.”

warned the organization to beware of Klansmen who were trying to “infiltrate” the councils in order to use them for their own “cowardly, secretive ends.” One citizens’ council leader assured Workman the groups were looking for only the “highest type of conservative leadership” for their local organizations.⁴³¹

Waring had embraced the citizens’ council movement in part because he believed the state’s political leadership had failed to develop an effective strategy for resisting the *Brown* ruling.⁴³² By early 1956, a politician with close ties to the *News and Courier* would change Waring’s mind. Strom Thurmond returned to public life with a flourish in late 1954, and by 1956 the former governor and Dixiecrat presidential candidate had taken a leading role in the state’s massive resistance campaign. When the state’s senior senator, Burnett Maybank of Charleston, died suddenly two months before the 1954 election, the state Democratic Party’s executive committee dispensed with a primary election and selected the long-time speaker of the state House of Representatives, Edgar Brown, to run in the November general election. Thurmond challenged the decision and mounted a successful write-in campaign, becoming the first US senator ever elected by write-in vote. When he entered the race, Thurmond had denounced the “backroom politics” that had denied South Carolina voters a primary election. And to show the depth of his commitment to the democratic process, he promised that, if he won in 1954, he would resign his seat two years later and face the voters again in 1956. With a re-election campaign looming so soon after arriving in Washington, Thurmond was eager to grab

⁴³¹ W.D. Workman, Jr., “Councils Must be Alert to Keep Out Klansmen,” *Charleston News and Courier*, Dec. 7, 1958.

⁴³² For example, see: “Where Are Leaders?” *Charleston News and Courier*, September 10, 1955, 8A.

headlines. The massive resistance effort provided the perfect opportunity, just as the Dixiecrat campaign had back in 1948.

In March 1956, Southern members of Congress would join the debate within the civil sphere over the meaning of the *Brown* ruling. Thurmond would claim primary authorship of the so-called Southern Manifesto, a document signed by 101 members of Congress from the South.⁴³³ Officially called “The Declaration of Southern Principles,” the final version stopped short of using the term “interposition,” but it commended “the motives of those states which had declared their intention to resist integration by any lawful means.” Like Workman’s Committee of 52 resolution, the Southern Manifesto criticized “outside agitators” for destroying the “amicable” relations between the races in the South. In the *News and Courier*, Waring said it was “high time” that southern members of Congress organized “to protect the rights of the states they represent from attack by the federal government.” Their decision would benefit all southerners, “both white and colored,” the *News and Courier* concluded.⁴³⁴

As southern congressmen delivered their manifesto in Washington, state lawmakers met in Columbia, and the two groups seemed to be competing to present the strongest pro-segregation message. As the *News and Courier*’s statehouse reporter, Workman covered the 1956 South Carolina General Assembly. It was the same body that

⁴³³ Thurmond’s actual role in writing the Southern Manifesto remains in dispute. Thurmond claimed he wrote an original draft that was accepted with minor edits. Others have suggested Thurmond overstated his role to boost his political profile in advance of the 1956 election. For a comprehensive overview of the dispute, see Finley, *Defying the Dream*, 142-146, and John K. Day, “The Southern Manifesto: Making Opposition to the Civil Rights Movement,” (PhD diss, University of Missouri-Columbia, 2006).

⁴³⁴ “For Southern Action,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 12, 1956, 12A; “96 Congressmen in Solid Front,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 15, 1956, 18A.

he had petitioned as author of the “interposition” resolution for the Committee of 52, and the state’s lawmakers did not disappoint him. In what Workman dubbed “the segregation session,” the General Assembly passed a resolution approving of the doctrine of interposition and vowing to fight federal efforts to enforce school integration. The lawmakers passed another resolution commending the work of the white citizens’ councils in South Carolina, and they ordered the closing of Edisto State Park, a facility that the NAACP had gone to court to integrate.⁴³⁵

More substantively, the South Carolina lawmakers joined other southern states in launching an effort to criminalize the NAACP. The General Assembly passed a bill that would make it illegal for city, county, and state employees in South Carolina to join the civil rights organization.⁴³⁶ Even some conservative white newspapers believed the measure was unconstitutional. The *Columbia Record* called the new law “ill-advised,” but contended the “litigious NAACP” had created the racial animosity in the South.⁴³⁷ Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr., signed the bill into law March 17.

Having lost his platform in the *Lighthouse and Informer*, John McCray turned to other means to denounce these measures. McCray disseminated a flyer that included his open letter to Timmerman on behalf of the Progressive Democratic Party. He accused the lawmakers of plotting “a course of self-destruction, chaos and rebellion” against the nation’s democratic principles, and he compared their actions to the work of “Fascist Italy, storm-trooping Germany” and the “Communists.” The anti-NAACP bill, he said,

⁴³⁵ W.D. Workman, Jr., “Lawmakers call for ‘interposition’ between Supreme Court, state schools,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 11, 1956.

⁴³⁶ Associated Press, “Assembly Passes Anti-NAACP Bill,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 13, 1956.

⁴³⁷ “The South’s War Against the N.A.A.C.P.,” *Columbia Record*, March 29, 1956, 4.

was an act of “punishment and persecution” against those who had been employing legal means to fight for their rights “in keeping with the American way.”⁴³⁸ With his letter, McCray hoped turn the white attack on the NAACP into a communications victory for the civil rights movement in the civil sphere. Appealing to the nation’s ideals, he depicted the white crackdown on the black civil rights organization as un-civil and anti-democratic effort to shut down free speech and free association.

The law criminalizing the civil rights organization for public employees had given segregationists a powerful weapon in their effort to curb black political activism. Public school teachers were the backbone of the small but growing black middle class in the Deep South in the mid-1950s. Their organizational skills, as well as their dues, had been instrumental in the growth of the NAACP. Although the law was certain to be overturned in the courts, the appeals would take time. And until then, white leaders could use the measure to harass and intimidate the black community. Across South Carolina, local school boards immediately added a page to their annual review and job application forms asking teachers to list organizational affiliations.⁴³⁹

In Charleston, the board of education targeted Septima Clark, one of the black community’s foremost political activists. Clark had been active in the NAACP since World War I, when she began teaching on Johns Island in Charleston County. By 1956, she was a veteran activist who was coordinating efforts with regional and national civil rights organizations. She had led workshops at the Highlander Folk School, an institution

⁴³⁸ “To the Honorable George Bell Timmerman, Jr, Governor, From: The S.C. Progressive Democrats,” March 4, 1956. WDW Papers: Civil Rights, 1956.

⁴³⁹ Katherine Mellen Charron, *Freedom’s Teacher: The Life of Septima Clark* (Chapel Hill: N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 243.

that had been founded in east Tennessee to train southern labor activists during the New Deal. It was now helping prepare southern blacks to lead civil rights efforts in their communities. In 1954, Clark had helped lead a workshop at Highlander that included a shy woman from Alabama named Rosa Parks, who would return to her home in Montgomery and play a leading role in the 1955 bus boycott.⁴⁴⁰

In June of 1956, Clark and four other Charleston County teachers received letters from the school board announcing their contracts would not be renewed the following year. The school board gave no explanation for its decision, but Clark said she knew the reason. She said she had been “completely outspoken” about civil rights in the past year. Clark had hoped to fight the school board’s decision, but she found only marginal support from a black community skittish in the face of the white crackdown. Clark had hoped to unite black teachers behind their dismissed colleagues, figuring the Charleston County school board could not afford to fire all of them at once. She sent more than 700 letters to her colleagues asking them to protest the anti-NAACP law and the local firings. Only 26 responded. Eleven of those agreed to meet with school officials, but only five actually showed up. Clark would call the effort “one of the failures of my life” because she realized she had “tried to push them into something they were not ready for.”⁴⁴¹ The fear of economic retribution from the white community had grown too strong.

As 1956 came to close, Waring and Workman had reason to be pleased. They had used their dual roles as journalists and political activists to help shape the white response to the *Brown* decisions and the rising push for African American rights in South Carolina.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, 220-242.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid, 244.

They had helped craft an “interposition” doctrine that had been embraced as policy by state lawmakers, and they had midwived the birth of a robust and politically active white citizens’ council movement. Through the pages of the *News and Courier*, they had framed the white response as a civil and appropriate rebuke to an unconstitutional federal intrusion into state sovereignty. By trying to force integration in the South, the newspaper repeatedly claimed, the federal government had ignored the will of both races in the region and assumed the role of dictator. Taking advantage of rising fears of Soviet aggression, Waring employed Cold War rhetoric to depict opponents of segregation as socialists and communists out to undermine American democracy. The NAACP was “a pawn of the Soviets,” Waring claimed. And the effort to end segregation in the South was an attempt “by the Communist Party” to create unrest and generate “anti-US propaganda.”⁴⁴²

At the same time, the civil rights movement that had grown so quickly in the past decade had begun to falter. The loss of the *Lighthouse and Informer* had denied the movement a powerful communications tool at a decisive moment in the battle with segregationists. The aggressiveness of the white citizens’ councils, the continuing presence of the Klan and other extremists, and the signing of the anti-NAACP law combined to intimidate blacks and spread new fear throughout the state. McCray and other black leaders spoke out as best they could, but with no weekly newspaper dedicated to the task of carrying their interpretation of local events deep into South Carolina’s black community, the sense of unity began to fade. The overwhelming commitment that had

⁴⁴² “Communism and ‘Civil Rights,’” *Charleston News and Courier*, July 25, 1956.

empowered African Americans to defeat the all-white primary and challenge segregation in Clarendon County had begun to dissipate.

But if Waring and Workman had reason to cheer at the end of 1956, the celebration would be brief. They may have helped to staunch the momentum of the civil rights effort in South Carolina, but the movement's focus would shift elsewhere in the Deep South, to Montgomery, Mississippi, and Little Rock. The national spotlight would grow brighter, and the two South Carolina journalists would find it more difficult to frame the debate over the struggle for African American civil rights in the South.

CHAPTER 7

THE RISE OF THE MODERN CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT

In the summer of 1958, Charleston *News and Courier* editor Thomas Waring was furious. The white citizens' council movement that he had helped launch in South Carolina had lost momentum. Hindered by weak leadership and internal squabbling, the white councils were "taking a siesta" when they should be girding for the battle to come, Waring complained. South Carolina needed a "vigorous" citizens' council movement, he contended, because "it is clear that trouble won't stay away from our door forever." As evidence, he pointed toward the upper South, where states appeared to be backing away from the interposition strategy they had vowed to use to defend segregation of public schools. Even in Virginia, home to interposition's strongest proponents – US Sen. Harry Byrd and Richmond editor James J. Kilpatrick – school officials discussed the merits of accepting "token" integration. For Waring, these were the words of "faint-hearted southerners" who were "suffering from frustration and defeatism." In Columbia, *The State* newspaper agreed. Token integration is still integration, Samuel Latimer's editorial page argued. "When the blows begin to fall" in the southern "core" states of Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, and South Carolina, leaders must "steadfastly resist the region's

ruination by federal force.”⁴⁴³ To accept any breach in racial separation was an act of surrender that would destroy the southern way of life.

Waring’s plea for southern unity and stepped-up citizens’ council activity came at a precarious time for the segregationists. The political landscape was shifting, and not in the white South’s favor. In the fall of 1957, Waring had watched in horror as President Eisenhower sent the 101st Airborne to Arkansas to protect nine African American students who were integrating Little Rock’s Central High School. Even before the showdown in Little Rock, Waring had described the president as “not the man we hoped he would be.”⁴⁴⁴ In the 1952 presidential election, white conservatives in the South had turned to Eisenhower as a possible political savior. Under his leadership, perhaps the Republican Party would reject its northern liberal wing and embrace states’ rights and local control over race relations in the South. That hope faded in 1954 when Eisenhower refused to denounce the *Brown* ruling, and it expired entirely during the president’s second term. Not only had Eisenhower deployed federal troops to enforce *Brown*, his administration had proposed ambitious civil rights legislation designed to protect African American voters in the South.⁴⁴⁵ In the eyes of Waring and other white southerners, the Republican Party under Eisenhower had turned out to be no different than the national Democrats. Both had abandoned the white South in favor of the growing number of white liberal and African American voters in the North.

⁴⁴³ “Citizens Councils Must Be Strong To Protect S.C. if Crisis Comes,” *Charleston News and Courier*, July 14, 1958; “Many Ways Open for South to Keep Separate Schools Within the Law,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 9, 1958; “Fight Not Lost,” *The State*, October 16, 1959, 4A.

⁴⁴⁴ “Of Mr. Eisenhower,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 1, 1956, 12A.

⁴⁴⁵ Eisenhower’s attorney general, Herbert Brownell, proposed the legislation in April 1956 and the president signed the final measure into law in 1957. See Findley, *Delaying the Dream*, 152-190.

Eisenhower's civil rights bill, drafted by Attorney General Herbert Brownell, was especially troubling for Waring and his allies in South Carolina. The measure focused on African American voting rights and threatened to further undermine white control of the Democratic Party. Brownell's bill called for the creation of a civil rights division within the Justice Department and an expansion of the agency's power to prosecute voting rights violations. Eisenhower would later say that he focused on voting rights because the ballot was the tool "the American Negro could use to safeguard his other rights."⁴⁴⁶ Waring's *News and Courier* saw the administration's civil rights push as another means of "chasing the Negro bloc vote in the North" at the expense of white southerners.⁴⁴⁷

When President Truman had proposed civil rights legislation a decade earlier, the South's powerful Senate delegation had blocked the measure in committee and used the threat of filibuster to kill it. When confronted with Eisenhower's bill, the southern senators pursued a different strategy. Led by Sen. Richard Russell of Georgia, the southerners negotiated with the White House and allowed a watered-down version of the voting rights measure to pass. The final bill had been stripped of its most potent enforcement mechanisms, but it still represented a major milestone in the nation's history.⁴⁴⁸ Eisenhower's voting rights bill was the first piece of civil rights legislation passed by Congress since Reconstruction. As historian Keith Findley has noted, Russell

⁴⁴⁶ Brownell quote as cited in Findley, *Delaying the Dream*, 153; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The White House Years: Waging Peace, 1956-1961* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), 156.

⁴⁴⁷ "The Bloc Vote," *Charleston News and Courier*, March 23, 1957, 12A.

⁴⁴⁸ The original measure would have allowed the justice department to adjudicate voting rights violations, but southern senators persuaded Eisenhower to accept local jury trials, knowing full well that all-white juries in the South were unlikely to convict a white southerner of violating a voting-rights law. See: Findley, *Delaying the Dream*, 172-188, and Caro, *Master of the Senate*, 848-1004.

and his colleagues relented because of growing national support for the civil rights movement. Like South Carolina's James F. Byrnes – the former governor who had tried to soften the South's national image with his school equalization plan earlier in the decade – Russell was a cagey politician who had been at the center of the nation's political life since the early 1930s. He feared blatant southern obstructionism would accelerate the shift in northern political opinion and force even greater change in race relations in the South. Additionally, Russell hoped passage of the 1957 civil rights bill – even a weakened version – would help Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson of Texas eventually reach the White House. No southerner could win the Democratic presidential nomination without the support of the party's northern liberals. Russell maintained that Johnson's success in guiding the civil rights bill through the Senate would enhance his image in the North and clear the way for a 1960 presidential bid. Accepting a weak civil rights bill now, Russell argued, would help the South in the long run by placing a southerner in the White House.⁴⁴⁹ Russell's strategy took it as a given that Johnson, as a southerner, would slow down the push for African American civil rights in the South, not speed them up.

In headlines and news stories, *Waring's News and Courier* referred to Eisenhower's civil rights proposal as “the force bill” because of the alleged power it granted to the federal government in racial matters. “Passage of Force Bill Urged by Eisenhower,” declared a front-headline as the bill moved through Congress. The president's initial proposal had called for federal judges to adjudicate charges of voting rights violations brought against white southern officials by the Justice Department.

⁴⁴⁹ Findley, *Delaying the Dream*, 172-188.

Russell and the southern delegation demanded that suspected violators be allowed to request jury trials, since it was unlikely that all-white juries in the South would ever convict in such cases. When the White House agreed, Russell persuaded his southern colleagues not to filibuster the measure and to allow it to pass. The *News and Courier* was thrilled when one southern senator refused Russell's command. The newspaper's long-time friend and ally, Strom Thurmond, defied Russell and broke ranks with his fellow southerners. In a futile effort to derail the bill, Thurmond launched a one-man filibuster that began the evening of August 28. The senator spoke nonstop for 24 hours and 18 minutes, a marathon performance that set a new record for uninterrupted speech on the Senate floor. Thurmond's grand gesture had no impact on the bill's final disposition, but it solidified his reputation as a lone wolf who was more than happy to alienate his Democratic colleagues in the Senate. The day after Thurmond's historic speech, the *News and Courier* headline read: "South's Senators Desert Thurmond." In a front-page editorial, Waring acknowledged that Thurmond had lost the battle but said the southern segregationists would eventually win their war. "Custer's Last Stand is one of the great American stories," the editorial said. "Custer lost the battle with the Indians. He lost his own life. But his name is not forgotten. The Indians finally were defeated."⁴⁵⁰

Eisenhower was a man of conservative temperament who had been born in the South and had always said he wanted to go slow on civil rights. He had personally expressed his opposition to school integration, and even after the *Brown* ruling had told Byrnes that he believed segregation would remain in force for many decades to come in

⁴⁵⁰ "Never Too Late to Protest," *Charleston News and Courier*, August 7, 1957, 1A.

the South.⁴⁵¹ But the Republican president faced increasing political pressure to act. The black counterpublic that W.E.B Du Bois and the NAACP had helped launch at the turn of twentieth century had grown dramatically during World War II. In the post-war years, circulation of the black press boomed.⁴⁵² Led by the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Chicago Defender*, and the magazines *Ebony* and *Jet*, the black media developed a national audience and prodded white editors to pay more attention to the African American community. It was a *Pittsburgh Courier* sportswriter, for example, who helped persuade the Brooklyn Dodgers to allow Jackie Robinson to break the color barrier and integrate major league baseball in 1947.⁴⁵³ Robinson's stoic resolve in the face of racial taunts and humiliating treatment by some fans, and even some teammates, only enhanced the growing white liberal support for black civil rights. By the mid-1950s, the northern white media had discovered the civil rights story, and their depictions of southern violence and intransigence fueled public outrage.

Brownell's civil rights proposal had been motivated in part by northern reaction to the 1955 murder of Emmett Louis Till, a Chicago teenager visiting relatives in Mississippi. Till was hardly the first black to be lynched in the South. But by the mid-1950s, the black counterpublic that had grown across the twentieth century had begun to exert real influence on the surrounding white society. Highlighted first by the black press, Till's abduction and killing eventually drew the nation's white media to Mississippi. It was the first time in the twentieth century that the mainstream northern press had focused

⁴⁵¹ Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 510-512.

⁴⁵² Washburn, *The African American Press*, 3-4.

⁴⁵³ David Shribman, "Hall of Famer Whose Pen Charted Path for Jackie Robinson," *New York Times*, March 8, 2014, SP2; Brian Carroll, *When to Stop the Cheering? The Black Press, the Black Community, and the Integration of Professional Baseball* (Routledge, 2006).

so intently on a white act of violence against an African American in the South. As Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff have pointed out, public reaction to the coverage was just as Gunnar Myrdal had predicted in *The American Dilemma*.⁴⁵⁴ Northerners were appalled by the searing images emerging from the drama: the teenager's mutilated body, the arrogant sneers of his killers, the quick and perfunctory verdicts delivered by the all-white jury. In September 1955, the Till case cast into stark relief the gap that existed between the nation's image of itself as fair and just and democratic, and the harsh reality of African American life in the South. The civic rupture at the heart of nation's civil sphere was growing more difficult to ignore.

In Charleston, the *News and Courier* had run Associated Press stories on the "Mississippi murder" on its front page for seven days running in September 1955.⁴⁵⁵ But the headline grew significantly larger and more prominent the morning after the white woman at the heart of the case testified in court. Carolyn Bryant claimed that Till had whistled at her suggestively and "asked her for a date" during an encounter at a small market in Money, Mississippi.⁴⁵⁶ Three days later, Bryant's husband and his half-brother abducted Till from this great-uncle's house. The teenager's disfigured and bloated body was later found floating on the surface of the Tallahatchie River.

On the *News and Courier's* editorial page, Waring called Till's death a "tragedy" and said his killers should be punished, but he quickly moved on to the argument at the heart of his editorial. The murder had provided "race agitators" with "welcome

⁴⁵⁴ Eugene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 86.

⁴⁵⁵ From author's review of the Charleston *News and Courier* during September 1955.

⁴⁵⁶ Associated Press, "Mrs. Bryant Says Negro Sought Date," *Charleston News and Courier*, September 22, 1955, 1A.

propaganda,” he said. Yet he contended the NAACP was partly responsible for the teenager’s death: “Had it not been for the constant dinning in the ears of colored people about denial of their ‘rights,’ the boy might never have made a remark that caused animosity in the rural community where he was visiting.” Waring urged “all decent people” to condemn the violence, but also to “sympathize with the good people of Mississippi” who will be unfairly blamed for it. The editor concluded with a thinly veiled threat for those pushing court-ordered integration in the South: “The death of this boy should remind all who tamper lightly with deep mass emotions that voluntary, friendly approaches are the only way the races can live together in peace.”⁴⁵⁷

The jury in tiny Sumner, Mississippi, had deliberated for 67 minutes before acquitting Carolyn Bryant’s husband and his half-brother of Till’s murder. The quick decision in the courtroom helped fuel public anger. Henry Luce’s *Life* magazine claimed white southerners who refused to condemn the verdict “were in danger of losing their souls.”⁴⁵⁸ The Vatican newspaper, *L’Osservatore Romano*, deplored that “a crime against an adolescent victim remained unpunished” and said the jury’s decision had left a “stain” on the United States.⁴⁵⁹ The *New York Post* said images from the Till case, as well as other “fragments of the southern tragedy,” should move the White House to act: “How much more must happen to awaken the humanity and conscience of the president.”⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ “Mississippi Murder,” *Charleston News and Courier*, September 2, 1955, 12A.

⁴⁵⁸ *Life Magazine*, October 9, 1955, as quoted in: Orville Hopkins, “Magazine Rack,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, October 9, 1955.

⁴⁵⁹ *L’Osservatore Romano* editorial quoted in: “Till Case Repercussions,” *Chicago Defender*, November 5, 1955, 9.

⁴⁶⁰ *New York Post* editorial quoted in: “Border States Yielding to Pressure But Deep South Can Win Race Battle,” *Charleston News and Courier*, September 14, 1956, 12A.

Waring dismissed the *Post* editorial as another example of a “biased” northern press that assumed all white southerners were “bigots.”⁴⁶¹ The *News and Courier* editor had been fighting a public relations battle with the northern media since he took over as the paper’s editor in 1951. In the months after the *Brown* ruling, Waring had struggled through four revisions of an essay for *Harper’s* magazine before the manuscript was finally published in January 1956. Editor John Fischer had said he wanted to publish a pro-segregationist statement that could serve as “a starting point for rational discussion.” What he got was a manuscript that “troubled” his conscience.⁴⁶² Waring’s essay depicted African Americans as immoral, unhealthy, prone to violence, and intellectually inferior. White southerners were decent people who were trying to help African Americans overcome these problems, Waring said. Yet white northerners never heard that side of the story because the northern press “has abandoned fair and objective reporting of the race story.” In Waring’s view, northern editors “almost without exception” have embraced the NAACP interpretation of events in the South and thus have replaced facts with “propaganda.”⁴⁶³

Waring’s experience with *Harper’s* appeared to crystalize his thoughts on the media and the role that northern public opinion was playing in the battle over civil rights in the South. At the same time that he was exchanging revisions and caustic letters with the *Harper’s* editor, Waring wrote a piece for *The Masthead*, the journal of the National Conference of Editorial Writers, which he also published on the front page of the *News*

⁴⁶¹ “Border States Yielding to Pressure But Deep South Can Win Race Battle,” *Charleston News and Courier*, September 14, 1956, 12A.

⁴⁶² John Fischer to Thomas Waring, September 30, 1955; Waring to John Fischer, October 4, 1955. TRW Papers: Correspondence, 1955.

⁴⁶³ Thomas R. Waring, Jr., “The Southern Case Against Desegregation,” *Harper’s*, January 1956, 39-45.

and Courier. His lead sentence was short and simple: “A paper curtain shuts out the Southern side of the race relations story from the rest of the country.” Northern newspapers and magazines have abandoned objective reporting, Waring wrote, and “the deluge of daily and weekly gazettes with anti-Southern slant is molding public opinion.” Not since *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Waring said, has there been “so powerful a blast of propaganda as to becloud the issues with emotion.” The states that comprised the old Confederacy must confront this new public relations problem, the editor maintained, because in this battle between North and South “there will be no secession.” Instead, public opinion will determine the outcome.⁴⁶⁴

Waring would turn his “paper curtain” analogy into a battle cry and launch a campaign to present the segregationist view in the national media. He lambasted northern editors who he contended would publish only liberal or moderate voices – Ralph McGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Pete McKnight of the *Charlotte Observer*, or Hodding Carter Jr. of Mississippi’s *Delta Democrat Times* – men who were willing to criticize the South. Like many of his segregationist allies, Waring accused northern newspapers of ignoring racial problems in their own communities. If more African Americans lived in the North, he said, white northerners would understand that “where large numbers of both races are put together, violence is the rule, not the exception.” To help prove his point, he and several other staunchly segregationist editors began pressing the Associated Press to report on racial conflicts across the North and Midwest. Their demands grew so frequent and disruptive that the AP president finally pleaded with Waring to back down. The editor agreed – he always wanted to maintain his good standing in the journalistic

⁴⁶⁴ Thomas R. Waring, “Paper Curtain Hides South’s View,” *Charleston News and Courier*, October 30, 1955, 1A.

community – but he continued his campaign to shred the “paper curtain.”⁴⁶⁵ When it came to race, white northerners were no different than white southerners, Waring maintained. Neither group supported forced integration in schools and in neighborhoods. It was hypocritical for northern editors and publishers, like *Time* and *Life*'s Luce, to call for school integration and social equality when so few African Americans lived in their neighborhoods. “It is time the North assumed its share of the white man’s burden and welcomed Negroes in their communities,” he said.⁴⁶⁶

Despite his efforts, it was clear by 1960 that Waring and the southern segregationists had lost the battle over public perception – and thus were losing the fight within the nation’s civil sphere. Their efforts to maintain the racial status quo were increasingly depicted as uncivil and anti-democratic, not in keeping with the nation’s ideals. As the civil rights campaign moved from the courtroom to the streets, with freedom riders, student sit-ins, and Martin Luther King Jr.’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference challenging state segregation laws across the South, the northern media flooded the region with reporters and camera crews. As historians have noted, their interpretation of the ongoing confrontations between white police and African American protesters fueled northern outrage over southern intransigence. Using the relatively new and powerful medium of television, correspondents delivered clear and stark images of courageous African Americans peacefully asserting their democratic rights in the face of a violent and uncivil foe.⁴⁶⁷ In the wake of such coverage, Waring and his segregationist

⁴⁶⁵ Waring’s personal papers document the campaign against the AP. Roberts and Klibanoff provide an especially detailed and colorful account of the editor’s efforts in *The Race Beat*, 216-219.

⁴⁶⁶ “Opening the North to Negroes,” *Charleston News and Courier*, March 28, 1958, 12A.

⁴⁶⁷ See, for example: Roberts and Klibanoff, *The Race Beat*, 270-333.

allies appeared to be stock villains from an earlier age, their arguments defending racial separation woefully outdated in a nation that now appeared to embrace a racially democratic future. An important pivot had occurred in the nation's civil sphere. The rupture that had allowed African Americans to be excluded from civic life was being repaired, and those who defended Jim Crow segregation were losing support within the civil sphere.

Oddly enough, it was Waring's friendship with a northern journalist during those difficult times that would help revive the fortunes of southern segregationists and point them toward a new and successful political strategy. William F. Buckley, Jr., began publishing the conservative journal *National Review* in 1955. Buckley's family owned a home in South Carolina's horse country near Camden, and Buckley and Waring had grown close during Buckley's visits to the state. The two traded letters frequently, and their talk often turned to politics. Like Waring, Buckley despised Eisenhower's "middle-of-the-road" policies, calling them "politically, intellectually, and morally repugnant."⁴⁶⁸ Eisenhower Republicans wanted to manage the growth of the "welfare state," Buckley charged. He envisioned a more radical conservative movement that would eradicate the vestiges of the New Deal altogether. At the *News and Courier*, Waring and his mentor, William Watts Ball, had been making the same argument for decades. Inevitably, Buckley's conversations with Waring turned to the question of southern conservatives and the issue of race – how did committed economic conservatives like Waring, who was

⁴⁶⁸ John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr. – Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 133.

also a segregationist, fit into Buckley's vision of a national conservative movement?⁴⁶⁹

Their answer to this question would eventually reshape American politics, and it would transform southern white conservatives. No longer political pariahs, they would re-emerge as a dominant force on the national stage.

A small group of intellectual conservatives had been wandering in the political wilderness since the Franklin Roosevelt election in 1932. Like the *News and Courier* editors, they had opposed the New Deal on principle. They believed federal intervention in the economy, even during the darkest days of the Depression, had damaged the nation. It had led to a centralization of federal power at the expense of state and local governments. As Ball had argued so vehemently during the 1930s, the growth of the federal government and its prominent role in the economy amounted to socialism, even communism. The idea ran contrary to the nation's founding principles, Ball had claimed. It would eventually destroy the capitalist spirit and commitment to freedom that had made the country great. Yet those conservative economic arguments had had little political impact, especially in the Deep South. During the 1930s and 40s, those who campaigned against the New Deal occupied the fringes of the two major political parties. The conservative wing of the Republican Party, led by Ohio Sen. Robert Taft, had been active since Roosevelt's first election. Initially, southern conservative Democrats had supported the New Deal, but they had second thoughts when they realized that New Deal policies were helping to empower African Americans to fight for their rights.⁴⁷⁰ By 1948,

⁴⁶⁹ Thomas R. Waring to William F. Buckley, Jr.; Buckley to Waring; Waring to Buckley, May-June, 1957. TRW Papers: Correspondence, 1956, 1957.

⁴⁷⁰ For more on the rise of the modern conservative movement in US politics, see: Rick Perlstine, *Before the Storm: Barry Goldwater and the Unmaking of the American Consensus* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Joseph E. Lowdnes, *From the New Deal*

when President Truman's "Fair Deal" proposals included civil rights legislation, even an old FDR ally like James F. Byrnes was ready to desert the Democratic Party.⁴⁷¹ Byrnes had publicly framed his break with Truman as a disagreement over deficit spending and other economic policies. But it was clear from the timing that Truman's civil rights push had been a primary motivator.⁴⁷²

When he launched *National Review*, Buckley said the journal had one immediate goal: to "stand athwart history, yelling Stop!" Buckley and his allies at the journal were social as well as economic conservatives. *National Review* opposed government interference in free-market capitalism, but it also supported the concept of social traditionalism. Buckley sought to unite libertarians and traditionalists by arguing that enduring social order grew organically, not through central planning or what he derisively called "social engineering." Communities were bound together by moral and philosophical traditions that had developed naturally over time, and they should not be

to the New Right: Race and the Southern Origins of Modern Conservatism (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006); Allan J. Lichtman, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008); Donald T. Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2007). For more on the role of the South in the rise of modern conservative movement, see: Crespino, *Strom Thurmond's America*; Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counter Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J.: 2006); Kevin Kruze, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Race: The Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge, La: Louisiana State University Press, 1996); Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁴⁷¹ See Chapter 5 for details of Byrnes' decision to break with Truman and support Eisenhower in the 1952 presidential election.

⁴⁷² See Chapter 5; also Robertson, *Sly and Able*, 510-525.

tampered with lightly. For example, egalitarianism may sound like an admirable goal to liberals, but societal hierarchies had evolved for a reason and their disruption would cause turmoil and dislocation. Critics argued that Buckley had linked two contradictory ideas. Unfettered capitalism and the constant change that it generated, they claimed, would inevitably clash with the desire to maintain social traditions. Nonetheless, *National Review's* combination of social and economic conservatism was particularly appealing to Waring and the southern conservatives. Like their protégé, William Watts Ball, they claimed to be laissez-faire capitalists who also wanted to maintain the racial status quo in the South.

Buckley had been hearing Waring's side of the segregationist argument at dinners and social gatherings for several years, and he embraced the *News and Courier* editor as a kindred spirit. They shared a common devotion to the preservation of traditions in society, particularly hierarchical order. By 1956, Buckley had decided that southern segregationists were the natural allies of economic conservatives, and he set out to build an intellectual and political relationship. As political scientist Joseph E. Lowndes notes, *National Review* was the first conservative journal to try to link the southern opposition to enforced integration with the antistatist argument that was central to economic conservatism. In doing so, Buckley and his colleagues hoped to persuade southerners to renounce their previous support for New Deal policies that provided the South with federal aid, and convince economic conservatives that southern segregationists were their allies in the broader battle against a centralized and invasive government. Yet *National Review* wanted to do this without appealing to blatant racism. Like Charles Wallace Collins and his Dixiecrat blueprint a decade earlier, *National Review* tried to craft an

argument that supported segregationist arguments in principle, but did not appear to violate the foundational and constitutional ideals of the nation. It was a tricky proposition, and Buckley stumbled in his first attempt to make the connection.

In its early efforts, *National Review* supported the interposition argument and the massive resistance campaign, claiming the Tenth Amendment granted states the right to challenge US Supreme Court decisions on constitutional grounds. The magazine had been arguing since its founding in 1955 that the *Brown* ruling and the threat of federal enforcement of school integration was the natural culmination of New Deal policies that increased federal aid to the states. If states took the federal money, they would eventually come under federal control, the editors contended. They urged states' rights supporters to break out of their "opportunistic stupor" and protect their independence by rejecting the government's blandishments.⁴⁷³

By 1957 – the year of Eisenhower's civil rights bill – Buckley moved beyond school integration and addressed the issue of African American voting rights in the South. Under the headline "Why the South Must Prevail," Buckley delivered the most forthright overture to southern segregationists yet. In its tone and its argument, the editorial sounded strikingly similar to those that had been running for years in Waring's *News and Courier*. For Buckley, the central question was "whether the White community in the South is entitled to take such measures as necessary to prevail, politically and culturally, in areas in which it does not predominate numerically. The sobering answer is Yes ... because, for the time being, it is the advanced race." In Buckley's view, "the claims of civilization supersede those of universal suffrage." The

⁴⁷³ "Return to States' Rights," *National Review*, April 18, 1956.

National Review “believed that the South’s premises are correct,” he concluded. “If the majority wills what is socially atavistic, then to thwart the majority may be, if undemocratic, enlightened.”⁴⁷⁴

Thrilled by Buckley’s *National Review* editorial, Waring proclaimed his support in the *News and Courier*. “The right to vote is not more basic than civilization,” Waring declared in the newspaper shortly after Buckley’s editorial appeared. “Universal suffrage is not the beginning of wisdom or the beginning of freedom.” Waring was especially pleased to hear those ideas emanating from outside the South. Yet the *News and Courier* editor realized Buckley’s racist argument ran against the grain of the shifting public opinion within the national civil sphere. He described Buckley’s editorial as “brave words” and pointed out that they had been “uttered by a respected northern journal.”

Buckley’s support for “undemocratic” measures to thwart African American voting rights in the South had in fact gone too far. Even his colleagues at *National Review* were appalled. Buckley’s argument had violated the nation’s democratic principles and undermined the constitutional arguments that had been used to link southern segregationists to the new conservative movement. The following week, Buckley’s brother-in-law, L. Brent Bozell, took the unusual step of attacking Buckley’s editorial in the pages of his own journal. Calling him “dead wrong,” Bozell said Buckley’s editorial threatened to do “grave hurt to the conservative movement.” The Fifteenth Amendment granting African Americans the right to vote was settled law,

⁴⁷⁴ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Why the South Must Prevail,” *National Review*, August 24, 1957.

Bozell said, and thus Buckley's argument was unconstitutional.⁴⁷⁵ It was okay to challenge *Brown* through interposition, Bozell said, because the constitution remained vague on whether the US Supreme Court actually had the right to impose federal control over states concerning education. But no such vagueness existed concerning the right to vote. Challenging African American suffrage required *National Review* to reject the primacy of the constitution in establishing US law. And it asked its readers to accept the harsh and antiquated racial notions of white supremacy and black inferiority. For many, those arguments sounded un-American; they violated the nation's ideals of a pluralistic society based on constitutional government and the rule of law.

Bozell's intervention served as an important course correction for the growing conservative movement as it sought to build a coalition that included southern segregationists. Going forward, conservatives would frame their arguments more carefully to avoid making the claim of white supremacy and thus drawing charges of blatant racism. Instead, they would develop more subtle interpretations that appealed to white southerners but also aligned more closely with the nation's founding ideals. They would adopt a so-called color-blind ethos that emphasized personal freedom and opportunity, but retained the segregationists' commitment to states' rights. In doing so, the conservative movement would attempt to co-opt the language African American Americans had used successfully to demand inclusion in equal citizens in democratic civil sphere.

It was Arizona Sen. Barry Goldwater who gave voice to this new conservative interpretation and spread it widely into the mainstream of American party politics. But it

⁴⁷⁵ L. Brent Bozell, "The Open Question," *National Review*, September 7, 1957.

was Waring and the emerging South Carolina Republican Party, working closely with the *National Review*, that helped launch Goldwater to national prominence. By 1959, a new breed of white conservative began to take control of the GOP in the state. Roger Milliken of Spartanburg and Greg Shorey of Greenville were industrialists who had moved to South Carolina to make their fortunes in manufacturing. Fiercely anti-government, they were primarily economic conservatives who opposed new taxes, government regulation, labor unions, and anything that appeared to support the so-called welfare state. They despised the Eisenhower White House and the liberal wing of the GOP led by New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller.⁴⁷⁶ They were Goldwater Republicans.⁴⁷⁷

Shorey and Milliken invited their hero to speak at the South Carolina Republican Convention in Greenville in 1959. The state GOP had few members, and the gathering was small, but Waring and the rest of the conservative press in the state ensured Goldwater's speech would get wide coverage. The Arizona senator delivered the expected indictment of federal spending and intrusive government, but he also linked those concerns to the push for civil rights and school integration in the South. The *Brown* ruling should not be "enforced by arms," Goldwater said, because it was "not based on law."⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷⁶ Buckley launched *National Review* in 1955. See John B. Judis, *William F. Buckley, Jr.: Patron Saint of the Conservatives* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

⁴⁷⁷ For more on the rise of Republican Party in South Carolina, see Bruce H. Kalk, *The Origins of the Southern Strategy: Two-Party Competition in South Carolina, 1950-1972* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011); Laura Jane Gifford, "Dixie is No Longer in the Bag": South Carolina Republicans and the Election of 1960, *The Journal of Policy History*, 19, 2, April 2007: 207-233; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*.

⁴⁷⁸ Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 115.

With the help of the *National Review* editors, Goldwater would refine his message over the next two years as he launched his battle against the Republican Party's liberal wing. In his political autobiography – ghost written by Bozell – Goldwater explained why opponents of “civil rights” were actually fighting to preserve the American system of government. Goldwater said that civil rights, “defined as rights to desegregated education,” do not exist. Despite the *Brown* ruling, he said the constitution prohibits federal involvement in state education. In a nod to the new color-blind ethos of the conservative movement, Goldwater tempered his argument by noting that he did not personally oppose integration. In fact, he said he believed desegregated schools were a good idea. But he emphasized that local officials, not the federal government, should make the choice.⁴⁷⁹

The new conservative movement shared many of the same concerns as the southerners, but they expressed their arguments using language that avoided the odor of racism and aligned more closely with acceptable American values. Waring, for example, had long contended that both major political parties had marginalized the white South in their desperate attempt to win the “Negro bloc vote” in the North. It was an argument that resonated with white southerners raised on the overheated mythology of carpetbaggers who manipulated credulous former slaves during Reconstruction. In 1956, he had charged that bribery of “minority blocs” in the form of “welfare” controlled the politics of the United States. He maintained Democratic politicians had been luring black voters with “baskets of food and leniency at the police station” since the New Deal began. “How long other white men will permit this disgrace to continue in the false name of ‘civil

⁴⁷⁹ Barry Goldwater, *The Conscience of a Conservative* (Victor Publishing, 1960) 15-25.

rights' and 'democracy' may determine the life expectancy of the American Republic," Waring said.⁴⁸⁰ Four years later, one of Waring's closest allies, *News and Courier* statehouse correspondent William D. Workman, Jr., again raised the issue of "minority bloc voting," but using language that emphasized the color-blind nature of his appeal. All citizens who meet "the requirements set for by impersonal, impartial, and color-blind law" should have the right to vote, Workman said, adding that anyone who blocks African Americans from voting illegally is admitting his inability "to out-manuever them in the give-and-take of political warfare."⁴⁸¹

Buckley and his colleagues at the *National Review* were teaching southern conservatives how to make their case more palatable in a northern civil sphere that had undergone significant changes in the previous decade. Goldwater tried to downplay the issue of race and focus on constitutional and economic issues, but some supporters would not go along, even in the North. One of those was William Loeb, the conservative editor of New Hampshire's *Manchester Union-Leader*. In an exchange of letters with Workman and J. Edward Thornton, an attorney in Mobile, Alabama, Loeb praised Goldwater and his conservative allies for their efforts to reshape the Republican Party. But Loeb worried that liberal and African American members of the party would never relinquish control to the conservatives. His solution violated the new rule concerning politically correct language: Loeb proposed the Republican Party "become the white man's party." He said he was not "against the Negroes but just FOR the white race." Loeb said his proposal would "leave Democrats with the Negro vote," but give the Republicans the white vote

⁴⁸⁰ "Courting of Negro Vote Gives Balance of U.S. To It's Weakest Group," *Charleston News and Courier*, July 31, 1956, 8A.

⁴⁸¹ William D. Workman Jr., *The Case for the South* (New York: Devon-Adair, 1960), 268.

and “white people, thank God, are still in the majority.” Sounding much like Waring, the New Hampshire editor believed “Negro outrages” in Northern cities would turn voters against the “Northern Democrats’ coddling of the Negroes” and ensure Republican gains in the next election.⁴⁸²

In Goldwater, Waring and Workman had found a national politician who was actively soliciting their support, and as 1960 approached they were hard at work building a conservative Republican Party in South Carolina. They would once again bring their newspaper into the middle of the state’s politics. As they had done earlier in helping launch the citizens’ council movement in South Carolina, the journalists publicly defended the new journalistic norms of independence, impartiality, and objectivity. But privately, they operated as political activists and played a central role in GOP party-building efforts. They consulted with party leaders on story ideas, helped to rewrite news releases, withheld significant political news, and developed campaign strategies to help the Republicans compete with the Democrats.⁴⁸³ In 1961, Workman would resign from the paper and run for the US Senate as a Republican. While ultimately unsuccessful, his 1962 campaign against Democratic Sen. Olin Johnston would garner more votes than any Republican since Reconstruction, and his vibrant campaign would lay the groundwork for the growth of the Republicans into the dominant political force in the state.

When Workman stepped down as statehouse reporter to run for the Senate, the decision may have raised eyebrows, but it did not violate the professional norms of

⁴⁸² William Loeb to J. Edward Thornton, June 7, 1961; J. Edward Thornton to William Loeb, June 9, 1961. WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Correspondence, 1961.

⁴⁸³ Based on evidence gathered from review of the Workman and Waring papers that is detailed in the body of this article.

modern journalism. The revolving door between press and politics has always existed, and the transition from one to the other, if handled transparently and with no overlap, has been an accepted practice.⁴⁸⁴ It has been considered unethical, however, when the journalist secretly pursues partisan political goals while claiming to maintain impartiality and independence. As Borden and Pritchard maintain, journalists have a “protected social function” of gathering, interpreting, and disseminating information, and as professionals they are expected to carry out that function without allowing partisan interests to compromise their “independent exercise of judgment.”⁴⁸⁵ As part of the professionalization of journalism across the twentieth century, news organizations incorporated rules governing partisanship and conflict of interest into both written and unwritten codes of ethics and standards.⁴⁸⁶ Workman and his editor violated this code of professional journalism and used their positions at the newspaper to help build a new, conservative version of the Republican Party in the state. Yet Workman felt the need to state when he announced his candidacy that it would be “inappropriate” and “unethical” to combine objective reporting with partisan politics.⁴⁸⁷ Workman’s decision to hide his political involvement indicates how problematic the issue had become for professional journalists who were tempted to engage in partisan activism.

⁴⁸⁴ Recent examples abound: Tim Russert, George Stephanopolus, and Pete Williams moved from political and governmental positions to work as impartial journalists on network television; Jay Carney of *Time Magazine* and Linda Douglass of ABC News left journalism to take prominent positions in the Obama administration.

⁴⁸⁵ Sandra L. Borden and Michael S. Pritchard, “Conflict of Interest in Journalism,” in *Conflict of Interest in the Professions*, eds. Michael Davis and Andrew Stark (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 74-75.

⁴⁸⁶ Lucinda D. Davenport and Ralph S. IZard, “Restrictive Policies of the Mass Media,” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 1, 1 (Fall/Winter 1985-86): 4-9.

⁴⁸⁷ Workman discussed journalism ethics when announcing his Senate candidacy. Transcript of Workman speech delivered in Georgetown, South Carolina, 1 December 1961. WDW Papers: Campaigns, Senate, 1962.

By the late 1950s, Workman had grown restless with his role reporter. He was working on a book called *The Case for the South* that defended segregation. In June 1958, he told Waring that his reporting job had become a “restricted cul-de-sac,” and that he wanted to write a Sunday opinion column in the *News and Courier*. A regular opinion column, he argued, would afford him “a sense of editorial release” and allow him to make a “more useful contribution” during this critical moment in South Carolina history.⁴⁸⁸ Waring, however, had complained frequently about the growing editorial comment included in the news stories coming out of his Columbia bureau.⁴⁸⁹ He told Workman that readers paid more attention to “hot news stories” than political columns. He feared Workman’s column would look like just another “\$5-a-month syndicated product.”⁴⁹⁰ But the editor knew Workman had other professional options and did not want to lose his top political reporter.⁴⁹¹ So Waring grudgingly granted Workman a Sunday opinion column in the *News and Courier*, but only if the correspondent agreed to continue his coverage of straight news as well.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁸ Workman to Waring, 9 June 1958, WDW Papers: Journalism, Charleston *News and Courier*, 1958.

⁴⁸⁹ Waring to Workman, September 13, 1957. TRW Papers: Correspondence, 1957.

⁴⁹⁰ Waring to Workman, June 16, 1958. TRW Papers: Correspondence, 1958.

⁴⁹¹ The *News and Courier* remained Workman’s primary employer throughout the 1950s, but he also filed statehouse news reports for the *Greenville (SC) News* and appeared regularly as a political reporter on WIS-TV in Columbia. Waring supported Workman’s arrangement with those organizations, but he grew concerned when Workman cut a deal with *The Charlotte Observer*. Waring despised the Charlotte paper, which he saw as a competitor; he granted Workman a raise and approved his new opinion column as long as Workman agreed to cut his ties with the *Observer*. See: Waring to Workman, June 16 1958. TRW Papers: Correspondence, 1958.

⁴⁹² Waring to Workman, June 16 1958. Thomas R. Waring Papers: Correspondence, 1958.

Workman's column gave him an outlet to express his support for the conservative Republicans,⁴⁹³ but the state party appeared to pose little threat to the Democrats. By 1960, white voters in the South had grown comfortable supporting Republicans at the presidential level, but the party had little success in state elections. South Carolina Republican leaders like Milliken and Shorey supported segregation and states' rights in 1960, but, as economic conservatives, they talked more about government intrusion into private business than federal enforcement of civil rights laws.⁴⁹⁴ The Republican Party could not compete with South Carolina Democrats on the issue of segregation, but Workman helped to change that. In 1962, his Senate campaign would unite racial and economic conservatives and point the way toward Republican control in the state. For the next two years, however, Workman and his editor continue in their dual roles as activists and journalists as they worked behind the scenes to build the Republican Party in South Carolina.

Workman's evolution from working journalist to political leader took a critical leap forward in January of 1960 with the publication of his book, *The Case for the South*. Though deeply racist, it was by the standards of the time an intellectual effort to defend segregation, and its publication transformed Workman into a national spokesman for the white South. Along with James Jackson Kilpatrick's *The Southern Case for School Segregation*, published in 1962, Workman's book represented a move away from the cruder excesses of earlier Southern defenses. Historian George Lewis called it "one of the

⁴⁹³ See, for example, W.D. Workman, Jr., "Is Two-Party System Growing in South?" *Charleston News and Courier*, November 14, 1961.

⁴⁹⁴ Their hero, Barry Goldwater, opposed segregation, but he supported states' rights and criticized federal intervention to enforce integration. Kalk, *The Origins of the Southern Strategy*, 25-54; Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 115-118.

more erudite” arguments in the defense of segregation. In the book, Workman claimed the *Brown* ruling and federal efforts to force integration had halted progress in race relations in the South. Black civil rights organizations like the NAACP cared more about political power than racial advancement, Workman said, and their efforts had empowered the Ku Klux Klan and its “unlovely cohorts who substitute muscle and meanness” for intellect in defending the South. The reasonable white southerner is “the man in the middle ... whose voice needs to be heard,” Workman wrote. “He demands for his state the right to administer his own domestic affairs, and he demands for himself the right to rear his children in the school atmosphere most conducive to their learning – all without hurt or harm to his Negro neighbor or to the Negro’s children.”⁴⁹⁵

Workman rested his case for segregation on one critical argument: Negroes, he said, remain inferior to whites, socially and intellectually, and “race-mixing” would lead to disaster for both races. Workman conceded that some black individuals had overcome remarkable odds to achieve success, “sometimes with direct white opposition.” But despite those gains, Workman argued the Negro race remained “a white man’s burden” – a “violent” and “indolent” people who needed guidance and leadership from their white superiors.⁴⁹⁶ Workman claimed most Southern blacks understood this point and had been content with the gradual pace of change in the South before outside forces got involved. He bemoaned what he saw as a rise in hostility between the races brought on by the civil rights movement. For example, he accused southern Negroes of growing “too sensitive” about the word “nigger.” Rather than an epithet, Workman considered the word a term of

⁴⁹⁵ William D. Workman, *The Case for the South* (New York: Devin-Adair, 1960), viii.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 158-163.

endearment. He called it a harmless mispronunciation by white southerners struggling to say “Negro” in their distinctively slow drawl.⁴⁹⁷

Workman’s book drew national attention. In a sympathetic review, the *Wall Street Journal* urged proponents of forced integration to read it. “The case for integrating the schools on moral, legal and political grounds is familiar,” the reviewer wrote. “Mr. Workman’s list of practical obstacles will be news to many non-Southern readers.”⁴⁹⁸ Television host Dave Garroway interviewed Workman on the “Today” program, an appearance that received widespread publicity in South Carolina. In introducing him, Garroway said, “Strangely enough, this is a view not frequently heard on television, but whether you agree with the view, open-minded people should allow the opinion to be heard.” The morning of the interview, *The State*, South Carolina’s capital city newspaper, ran a front-page story encouraging its readers to tune in.⁴⁹⁹ In Washington, Thurmond sent every member of the US Senate a copy of *The Case for the South*.⁵⁰⁰

In South Carolina, Workman’s book was a sensation, and the journalist became a hot commodity on the speaking circuit. Between February and June of 1960, he seemed to be on the agenda at every civic organization across the state: The Women’s Club in Columbia; the Kiwanis Club of Greenville; the Rotary Club in Florence; the Historical Society in Sumter; the Citadel Round Table in Charleston; the Sertoma Club in Beaufort; and the Kiwanis Club again, this time back in Columbia. In Lancaster, Workman

⁴⁹⁷ Workman, *The Case for the South*, 46-47.

⁴⁹⁸ William H. Chamberlain, “News for Non-Southerners,” *The News and Observer*, Dec. 29, Feb. 7, 1960 (The review was reprinted from *The Wall Street Journal*, and is archived in William D. Workman Papers: Bounded Clips, 1959-1960.

⁴⁹⁹ “On TV Today,” *The State*, Feb. 18, 1960, 1.

⁵⁰⁰ “‘Case for South’ Presented by Thurmond to Colleagues,” *The News and Courier*, March 4, 1960, 7A.

delivered a speech sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce's Cultural Improvement Committee. In Aiken later that month, the journalist served as keynote speaker for a ceremony marking the "Battle of Aiken," billed as the South's last victory in The Civil War. Workman used the occasion to urge the white South to unite politically to restore the region's political clout.⁵⁰¹ In March, the *News and Courier* ran this front-page headline: "Newsman Himself in News." The keynote speaker at the state Democratic Party Convention had urged every delegate to read Workman's book "page for page."⁵⁰²

Workman's book tour reached a crescendo in late June, when governor Ernest Hollings and 400 prominent South Carolinians gathered at the Wade Hampton Hotel in Columbia and honored the journalist at a testimonial dinner. *The State*, the capital city's morning newspaper, ran a four-column headline at the top of the front page: "Workman Praised as Major Proponent for South's Cause."⁵⁰³ At the dinner, Waring playfully described his abstemious friend as "no liquor, no tie, no lie." And another colleague from the Charleston paper announced with great fanfare that a New York newspaper syndication firm would begin syndicating Workman's column, thus holding out the promise that his views would be circulated beyond the South and help stem the shift in public opinion in the northern civil sphere.

For Workman, however, the highlight of the evening must have been the keynote address delivered by one his heroes – James Jackson Kilpatrick, editor of the *Richmond*

⁵⁰¹ Newspaper clips reporting the civic club speeches are found in WDW Papers: Bound Clips, 1959-1960.

⁵⁰² "Newsman Himself in the News," *The News and Courier*, March 17, 1960, 1.

⁵⁰³ "Workman Praised as Major Proponent for South's Cause," *The State*, June 8, 1960, 1.

News Leader and an intellectual architect of the southern resistance to *Brown* and school integration. In a speech laced with more light humor than serious politics, Kilpatrick said the South believes “the least government is the best government,” but he said “society is determined to impose ‘a new order,’” on the region. Finally, after all the testimonials, Workman took the stage. In what the newspaper described as a “terse” speech, he made light of the event – “This is the closest a newspaper man ever gets to covering his own funeral” – but ended on a serious note, perhaps foreshadowing the significant role he would play in Southern politics: “What else can a man ask for than to be a Southerner during times like these?”

Once a mere political journalist in a sleepy state capital, Workman had been transformed by into a national spokesman for the white southern cause. He had been making the same arguments in his political columns since before the *Brown* ruling. But with the book, he had gathered those arguments in one place, and with the support of his New York publisher, had gotten them into the hands of the national media and national book reviewers. The national television appearances and the reviews in national and regional newspapers spread Workman’s arguments far beyond the covers of the actual hard-back book.⁵⁰⁴ And they elevated his status, both nationally and at home, as a serious voice in the public sphere. As historian Priscilla Coit Murphy has written, “For a single voice seeking to communicate a message of public interest, publication of a book represented special access” to the media system, and thus wide dissemination of the author’s ideas, as well as a “special kind of opportunity for public discussion of an

⁵⁰⁴ In addition to the *Today* show, Workman appeared on a CBS News national public affairs program in May of 1960; his book was also reviewed in several regional newspapers outside the South, including *The San Francisco Chronicle*.

issue.”⁵⁰⁵ Murphy was writing about a very different book published during the same time period, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*. But her point about the power of a published book applies to Workman as well. Publication of *The Case for The South* positioned Workman to play a new and more significant role in the coming transformation of southern politics. His 1962 Senate campaign would unite racial and economic conservatives to create a competitive Republican Party in South Carolina, but only after three years of political activism behind the scenes. While his support for segregation was well known, Workman and his newspaper concealed his political participation while he worked as a political reporter and a columnist.

In late February of 1960, state GOP official W.W. “Duck” Wannamaker, Jr. saw Workman outside the governor’s office in Columbia and told him that Goldwater had agreed to serve as keynote speaker at the South Carolina Republican Party’s state convention in March. Workman, however, was not interested in breaking the news. He agreed instead to help the Republicans maximize publicity for the senator’s appearance. Workman advised Wannamaker to wait until two weeks before the convention and send the release to the state Associated Press bureau on a Saturday so that the story would appear in Sunday newspapers across the state. Wannamaker later showed Workman a draft of the release and asked the journalist if he would “polish it up and put it in good newspaper form.”⁵⁰⁶ Workman wanted a number of changes. “Start off with Goldwater as the attention-getter,” Workman said. He proposed a first sentence: “U.S. Senator Barry

⁵⁰⁵ Priscilla Coit Murphy, “Books and the Media: The *Silent Spring* Debate,” in *The History of the Book, Volume 5, The Enduring Book, Print Culture in Post-War America*, eds., David Paul Nord, Joan Shelley Rubin, and Michael Schudson (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina, 2009), 447-458.

⁵⁰⁶ Wannamaker to Workman, February 20, 1960. WDW Papers: Politics, 1960.

Goldwater of Arizona, outspoken leader of conservative elements in the Republican Party, will address the State Republican Convention in Columbia on March 26.”

Workman recommended including a direct quotation from Greg Shorey “plugging Goldwater and the coincidence of his views with most southerners.” He also suggested pointing out that Goldwater “is another in a number of prominent Republicans who have appeared” in South Carolina since Shorey took over as party chairman.⁵⁰⁷ Wannamaker wrote back the next day thanking the journalist and telling him that the his ideas “are excellent and we shall certainly follow your advice.”⁵⁰⁸

Workman was not the only *News and Courier* journalist communicating behind the scenes with state Republicans in early 1960. Roger Milliken, the textile magnate who helped finance the state GOP, gave Waring confidential information about plans for South Carolina Republicans to embarrass the party’s presumptive presidential nominee, Vice President Richard Nixon, by nominating Goldwater for president at their state convention in March. Waring passed along the news to Workman, but warned him that even some top GOP figures in the state were unaware of the scheme. The idea, Waring wrote, is to alert “GOP bigwigs and Nixon personally to conservative sentiment in these parts.”⁵⁰⁹ Once again, Workman had a political scoop, but he and his colleagues at the *News and Courier* made no effort to break the story before the convention. Workman and Waring were apparently more interested in fomenting the Goldwater insurgency than reporting on it.

⁵⁰⁷ Workman to Wannamker, February 26, 1960. WDW Papers: Politics, 1960.

⁵⁰⁸ Wannamker to Workman, March 3, 1960. WDW Papers: Politics, 1960.

⁵⁰⁹ Waring to Workman, March 6, 1960, WDW Papers: Politics, 1960; Gifford, “Dixie is No Longer in the Bag,” 207-233.

On the day of Goldwater's appearance at the GOP state convention, the *News and Courier* and the *Greenville News* published Workman's review of Goldwater's book, *The Conscience of a Conservative*. He called the senator "one of the most forthright citizens to appear on the national scene in many a year."⁵¹⁰ Later that day, Goldwater thrilled the state's Republican convention delegates in Columbia with an attack on Democrats who were leading the nation "on the road to socialism."⁵¹¹ As planned, the GOP delegates nominated their conservative hero for the Republican presidential nomination by acclamation, thus launching Goldwater's long-shot bid to derail the Nixon nomination and put the newly energized conservative wing in charge of the national Republican Party.⁵¹²

Workman served as both political reporter and opinion columnist throughout the 1960 presidential campaign. In July, Workman the reporter covered the debate over a civil rights plank approved at the Democratic national convention in Los Angeles. He described southern Democrats who were "sputtering and gagging over a bitter dose of civil rights medicine" embodied in the party's platform.⁵¹³ Disappointed with the nomination of Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts over the southern candidate, Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson of Texas, Workman predicted the Democrats would struggle to win votes in the South. In one news story, he said "southern

⁵¹⁰ William D. Workman, "Senator Goldwater on States' Rights," *Greenville News*, March 27 March, 1960.

⁵¹¹ "Goldwater addresses GOP Convention," *The State*, March 27, 1960.

⁵¹² Gifford, "No Longer in the Bag," 207-233; See also, Perlstein, *Before the Storm*, 371-406.

⁵¹³ William D. Workman, Jr., "Rights Plank Angers Delegates from South," *Charleston News and Courier*, July 12, 1960.

independents” were waiting to see whom the GOP nominated before deciding where to place their support.⁵¹⁴

Workman the columnist wanted those independents to band together behind a reliably conservative candidate. His first choice would be Goldwater, but he knew the senator had no chance of wresting the nomination from Nixon, despite an all-out push by the South Carolina Republicans.⁵¹⁵ On the eve of the Republican convention, when Nixon reached out to appease the liberal Rockefeller in the so-called “Compact of Fifth Avenue,” the South Carolina Republicans girded for war. With national television cameras rolling, state GOP chairman Greg Shorey stepped up to the convention podium and delivered a passionate plea on behalf of Goldwater. Nixon won the nomination, but Goldwater’s insurgency at the 1960 convention gave the nation its first up-close look at the new and surprisingly strong conservative wing of the Republican Party, a movement fueled by southern activists like Shorey, Milliken, and Wannamaker of South Carolina.⁵¹⁶

Faced with a choice between Kennedy and Nixon, a disappointed Workman used his column to bemoan the lack of a stronger conservative candidate. “The sleeping giant of American politics is a bumbling fellow named ‘conservative’ whose strength is held in check by Lilliputian liberals,” Workman wrote. “He is a stout fellow, this ‘conservative,’ yet placid. He dislikes much of what he sees about him ... but he cannot guide his mind and his muscles in corrective action.” Workman wanted conservatives from both parties to band together to find a new political home. Northern liberals controlled the Democratic

⁵¹⁴ William D. Workman, Jr., “Independents Are Waiting on GOP,” *Charleston News and Courier*, July 21, 1960.

⁵¹⁵ William D. Workman, Jr., “Conservatives of Both Parties Cannot Agree on Common Action,” *Charleston News and Courier*, July 6, 1960.

⁵¹⁶ Perlstein, *Before the Storm*; Gifford, “No Longer in the Bag.”

Party, he said, and they were actively seeking black support. Despite Goldwater's push, the Republicans remained the moderate and so-called "modern" GOP of Eisenhower's presidency. Until conservative Democrats and conservative Republicans united in one party, Workman said, they would remain politically weak.⁵¹⁷ Greg Shorey read the column with pleasure. "I can't tell you how grateful I am for the splendid article," he wrote to Workman. "This is a significant contribution to not only our efforts but to a better understanding by the electorate of what we are trying to accomplish."⁵¹⁸

Kennedy won South Carolina with just 51.2 percent of the vote. His South Carolina campaign exemplified the split within the party. The campaign white leadership in the state resorted to openly racist appeals. They accused Nixon of supporting integration, socializing with black celebrities, and being a member of the NAACP. They distributed pictures of federal troops enforcing integration in Arkansas in 1957. The headline read: "Remember Little Rock."⁵¹⁹ Nonetheless, black voters in South Carolina supported Kennedy and the Democrats in overwhelming numbers, a fact not lost on the conservative Republicans. Shortly after the election, Milliken sent Waring a letter with details of black voting patterns across the state. Waring thanked the GOP activist and assured him he would look into the story. "Loss of the state was surely not due to any failures on your part," the editor wrote to Milliken. "I enjoyed working with you and look

⁵¹⁷ Workman, "Conservatives of Both Parties Cannot Agree on Common Action," *Greenville News*, July 21, 1960, 1A.

⁵¹⁸ Shorey to Workman, July 21, 1960. William D. Workman Papers: Correspondence, 1960.

⁵¹⁹ Olin D. Johnston Papers: 1960 Clippings, Box 153.

forward to many more opportunities to strike a blow for freedom. We have plenty to do.”⁵²⁰

Waring forwarded Milliken’s letter and voting analysis to Workman and asked: “Think this can be interpreted and possibly reproduced?”⁵²¹ The same day, Workman wrote a letter to John H. McCray, the black journalist and leader of the Progressive Democrats, the mostly African American political organization. Workman asked about the large Democratic vote in three black precincts in Columbia and Darlington. “Do you think this reflects the general pattern of Negro voting throughout the state?” Workman inquired.⁵²² No record of McCray’s response exists. Two weeks later, Workman’s analysis appeared as a front-page news story in the *News and Courier* and the *Greenville News*. “The pro-Democratic vote of South Carolina Negroes was a major, perhaps deciding factor,” he wrote, in winning the extremely close race for the Democratic Party.⁵²³ By reaching out to allies working with the *News and Courier*, Milliken had propelled the story of black-voter support for the Democrats to the front pages of the state’s newspapers. The message was clear: If new black voters had found a home in the Democratic Party, then it must not be the place for southern white conservatives.

Workman’s Senate campaign grew out of a surprise Republican victory in South Carolina in August 1961. A well-known Columbia businessman named Charles Boineau, who had joined the party the year before, ran for an open state House seat in a special

⁵²⁰ Roger Milliken to Waring, November 16, 1960; Waring to Milliken, November 20, 1960. WDW Papers: Correspondence, 1960. (Copies of the exchange between Milliken and Waring are contained in the Workman papers.)

⁵²¹ Waring to Workman, November 20, 1960. WDW Papers: Correspondence, 1960.

⁵²² Workman to McCray, November 20, 1960. WDW Papers: Correspondence, 1960.

⁵²³ William D. Workman, Jr., “State’s Negroes Backed Kennedy,” 2 December 1960, *Greenville News*.

election in Richland County.⁵²⁴ The race drew a small turnout, and Boineau won a narrow victory. He became the first Republican elected to the South Carolina House since the 1890s.⁵²⁵

Buoyed by Boineau's victory, state Republicans set their sights on the US Senate seat held by Olin D. Johnston, a former textile worker who had held public office since the Depression. The man who ran Boineau's improbable campaign, Republican activist J. Drake Edens, hatched a plan to draft Workman into the 1962 race against Johnston. He organized a committee of Richland County Republicans who called publicly for Workman to run for the GOP nomination.⁵²⁶ Workman claimed he had no formal ties to the Republican Party and no involvement with the draft effort. Workman told Edens, however, that if the Republicans nominated him he would accept the bid and enter the race.⁵²⁷ The statement was, in effect, an admission that he hoped to enter electoral politics. For the next three months, however, Workman continued to serve as a news reporter and opinion columnist while his allies in the GOP ran a de facto campaign for

⁵²⁴ "Charles Evans Boineau, Jr., Papers: Biographical Note, SCPC.

⁵²⁵ Boineau's election was something of a fluke; he failed to win re-election in the regularly scheduled election a year later, and he never again held elective office.

⁵²⁶ Associated Press, "GOP in Richland County Back Workman," *Charleston News and Courier*, November 15, 1961, B1; See also "To Seek U.S. Senate Nomination: Workman Resigns Newspaper Post," *Greenville News*, December 2, 1961, 1A; Leverne Prosser, "Workman Will Seek GOP Nomination," *Charleston News and Courier*, December 2, 1961, 1A. The details of the draft Workman movement are included in the newspaper stories reporting Workman's entry into the Senate race.

⁵²⁷ "To Seek U.S. Senate Nomination: Workman Resigns Newspaper Post," *Greenville News*; Prosser, "Workman Will Seek GOP Nomination." Workman recounted his earlier conversations with Edens when he announced his resignation from the newspaper.

the Senate nomination. The question of the journalistic ethics of such a dual role received no mention in the state's largest newspapers.⁵²⁸

Readers of the *News and Courier* could notice Workman's multiple roles. They could pick up the newspaper on November 14, 1961, and see his byline over a column on the editorial page that discussed the new "respectability" of the Republican Party in South Carolina.⁵²⁹ Deeper in that day's newspaper they would find Workman's byline over a hard news piece on the arguments in a state Supreme Court case involving civil rights demonstrators.⁵³⁰ The next day, readers would see a brief story from the Associated Press about Edens' effort to draft Workman into the Senate race. Headlined "GOP in Richland County Backs Workman," the story identified the journalist as simply a "political columnist" and did not mention his position at the *News and Courier*.⁵³¹ Workman the straight-news reporter appeared again on November 23 with a story on a statehouse hearing about stevedore rates at the Port of Charleston.⁵³² A week later, Workman the columnist had a piece on the editorial page posing the question: Why is Goldwater so popular? "To this reporter," Workman wrote, "the answer seems to be that Goldwater sticks forthrightly to a relatively simple set of government principles."⁵³³

⁵²⁸ Based on author's review of major newspapers in South Carolina: *The State*, *Columbia Record*, *News and Courier*, and *Greenville News*.

⁵²⁹ W.D. Workman, Jr., "Is Two-Party System Growing in South?" *Charleston News and Courier*, November 14, 1961.

⁵³⁰ W.D. Workman, Jr., "Supreme Court Hears Case About Negro Sit-ins," *Charleston News and Courier*, November 14, 1961.

⁵³¹ Associated Press, "GOP in Richland County Back Workman," *News and Courier*, November 15, 1961.

⁵³² W.D. Workman, Jr., "Shipping Officials Term Stevedoring Charge Fair," *Charleston News and Courier*, November 23, 1961.

⁵³³ W.D. Workman, Jr., "Profile of Goldwater," *Charleston News and Courier*, November 25, 1961.

Finally, on December 2, a front-page story from the Associated Press announced that Workman was officially entering the race for the GOP Senate nomination.⁵³⁴

At his campaign's kick-off rally, Workman addressed the ethical questions of what he called "his evolution" from journalist to candidate. Until recently, he said, "my field" had been journalism, and he considered it "highly improper (and) unethical for an individual to seek to combine objective reporting with partisan politics." When Edens proposed the draft movement, Workman said he agreed to push ahead and "see what happens." Workman also said that he wanted to retain his freedom "to go about my business – let me continue in my newspapering." For the past three months, Workman told the crowd, he had been a "passive" candidate and thus could still operate as an impartial and independent journalist. When it became clear that he would have to campaign to win the nomination, Workman said, he decided to end his "passive campaign" and formally enter the race.⁵³⁵

At that first rally, Workman could not help bragging to his partisan audience that his "passive" campaign had actually been a lot more active than advertised. He had delivered 18 speeches to more than 2,500 people in the past two months, he said, "and if it gets any more passive I can't stand it."⁵³⁶ Workman had been employed in a professional environment at the *News and Courier* where top editors had always been engaged in political activism. By the 1950s, however, the newspaper saw the need to

⁵³⁴ Associated Press, "Workman to Seek Nomination," *Charleston News and Courier*, December 2, 1961, 1A.

⁵³⁵ Transcript of Workman speech delivered in Georgetown, South Carolina, December 1, 1961. WDW Papers: Campaigns, Senate, 1962.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

acknowledge expectations of unbiased reporting and journalistic independence. But Workman failed to discuss openly the contradiction of encouraging the efforts of a campaign draft movement while being a news reporter

Workman had been a journalist in South Carolina since 1936 and a political correspondent in the capital city for 16 years. He had close ties with the state's daily newspapers, and none raised ethical concerns about his dual role as journalist and politician. In fact, the press seemed disappointed that he would no longer be reporting from Columbia. The day after Workman launched his campaign, the *Greenville News* ran an editorial under the headline, "An Able Correspondent Resigns." The piece read more like a salute to a retiring employee than an editorial confronting tricky questions of journalism and politics. "Bill Workman is his own man," the editorial said. "He is making sure that he will neither embarrass his former newspaper employers nor be embarrassed by them during the campaign. In his usual forthright fashion, he resigned rather than ask for a leave of absence." The newspaper's editors said they would continue running Workman's political columns, which "of course will deal with regional, national and international matters," not state politics.⁵³⁷

The *News and Courier* also announced plans to continue running Workman's column and defended the decision with a pointed example: "Ample precedent exists for people actively engaged in politics to write newspaper columns," the paper said. "For example, Sen. Barry Goldwater, who actually holds office, syndicates a column to newspapers."⁵³⁸ Workman's columns immediately following his campaign

⁵³⁷ "An Able Correspondent Resigns," *Greenville News*, December 2, 1961, 12A.

⁵³⁸ "Workman's Column," *Charleston News and Courier*, December 13, 1961, 8A.

announcement did not deal directly with South Carolina politics. They focused instead on the Cold War and criticism of the Kennedy administration.⁵³⁹

With Edens at the helm, Workman ran a vigorous campaign and helped boost the GOP in South Carolina by establishing volunteer organizations in every county in the state.⁵⁴⁰ In Sumter, Workman played up his journalistic background, especially his reputation as a dogged news reporter: “Some of you know me as a columnist you may – or may not – read three times a week. But many know me without coat and tie – as a shirt-sleeved, shoe-leather reporter, with pencil in hand and question on tongue, inquiring into the problems of the people of South Carolina.”⁵⁴¹

By October, the polls showed the Senate race surprisingly tight, and the national media took interest. James Reston of the *New York Times* came to South Carolina to investigate the rising Republican phenomenon in the South. He called Workman a “journalistic Goldwater Republican,” and he described an editorial that Waring had published in the *News and Courier*: “His theme is a vote for (Democrat Olin) Johnston is a vote of confidence for the Kennedys ... while a vote against Johnston is a vote against ‘the Kennedy master-state.’”⁵⁴² Reston said he had been hearing the same refrain across the state from Democrats as well as Republicans. The political reporter had spotted a trend that was well under way in South Carolina and across the Deep South. The “great

⁵³⁹ For examples, see W.D. Workman, Jr., “Citizens Must Inform Themselves,” *Charleston News and Courier*, December 9, 1961; W.D. Workman, Jr., “Legal Dilemma Faces Commies,” *Charleston News and Courier*, December 11, 1961.

⁵⁴⁰ Memorandum by J. Drake Edens, July 1962, William D. Workman Papers: Campaigns, Senate, 1962.

⁵⁴¹ William D. Workman, Jr., “Notes for Sumter, SC, speech,” William D. Workman Papers: Campaigns, Senate, 1960.

⁵⁴² James Reston, “How They Fight Elections in South Carolina,” *New York Times*, October 19, 1962.

white switch” had begun.⁵⁴³ Southern conservatives were fleeing the Democratic Party and finding a new political home in the Goldwater wing of the Republican Party. Over the next four decades, the conservative movement that Workman and Waring helped launch would develop into the dominant political force in both the Deep South and the nation.⁵⁴⁴

Workman had always believed that his newspaper job existed at the intersection of journalism and politics. As a young man, he said he decided to pursue newspaper work because he eventually wanted to be “involved in government and politics in some way.”⁵⁴⁵ By the late 1950s, Workman realized the role of journalist – even opinion journalist – would not satisfy his desire to engage fully in the public sphere. At the same time, he knew that the standards of his profession prevented him from informing his readers of his political activism. So for the three years before he announced his Senate campaign, Workman left his readers in the dark. He presented his news reports and his columns as the detached and independent observations of a journalist trying to get at the truth. In reality, they were the work of a partisan deeply engaged in the battle between the two major political parties.

⁵⁴³ Earl Black and Merle Black. *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2002), 4. The authors identify two “great white switches” – the increase in the white Southern vote for Republicans in presidential elections, which occurred in the 1950s and early 1960s, and the change in white southern political party identification, which came in the 1980s.

⁵⁴⁴ Jim Martin, a Republican candidate for US Senate in Alabama in 1962, also performed surprisingly well in losing to Democratic incumbent J. Lister Hill; see Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, 1-11; Kalk, *The Origin of the Southern Strategy*, 55-78; Charles S. Bullock, III and Mark J. Rozell, eds. *The New Politics of the Old South* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 1-28.

⁵⁴⁵ William D. Workman, Jr., personal essay, WDW Papers: Personal: 1936.

In public, Workman and Waring seemed to embrace the “monitorial” role of modern American journalism.⁵⁴⁶ Under this model, journalists are considered to be unbiased seekers of truth who use their constitutionally protected positions to serve the democratic process by providing impartial and trustworthy political information to the public. Journalists are allowed some leeway to interpret events, but they are supposed to draw the line at advocacy; otherwise, they could be accused of a conflict of interest. Across the twentieth century, mainstream American journalists embraced such standards in theory, but in practice they often found their roles too limited and restricted. Workman and Waring, who had been mentored by a powerful editor who believed he had an obligation to engage in advocacy, adopted the contemporary standards of impartiality. Yet, their personal commitment to segregation, combined with white community consensus on the issue, led them to openly oppose the civil rights movement. When the conservative wing of the Republican Party embraced states rights and emerged as a viable alternative to the Democrats in the South, Workman and Waring joined that cause, but they hid their party-building activities to avoid violating the norms of their profession. Unlike their mentor, they carried out their political activism underground, out of sight of their readers.

After his election loss in 1962, Workman returned to what he described as his “life’s calling” – the newspaper business.⁵⁴⁷ The largest paper in South Carolina, *The State*, immediately hired him as an assistant editor, and in 1966 he became the

⁵⁴⁶ Christians, et al., *Normative Theories of the Media*, 125.

⁵⁴⁷ William D. Workman to Americans for Constitutional Action, December 3, 1962. William D. Workman Papers: Correspondence, 1962.

newspaper's executive editor, overseeing the news and editorial operations.⁵⁴⁸ His detour into electoral politics appeared to do no harm to his career as a newsman.

⁵⁴⁸ WDW Papers: Biographical Notes; Workman retired from *The State* in 1979.

CHAPTER 8

EPILOGUE: COLOR-BLIND RHETORIC AND THE CIVIL SPHERE

On the evening of September 15, 1964, the *CBS Evening News* broadcast a political scoop: Strom Thurmond, the Democratic senator from South Carolina, planned to switch political parties and become a Republican.⁵⁴⁹ The next day, Thurmond flew from Washington to South Carolina and confirmed the stunning news in a statewide television address. Angered by President Lyndon Johnson's support for Civil Rights Act of 1964, which had been signed into law two months earlier, Thurmond denounced the national Democrats as the "party of minority groups" and "power-hungry union leaders." Under Johnson's leadership, Thurmond said, the Democrats had embraced liberal policies that "encourage lawlessness, civil unrest, and mob action." Declaring that "the party of our fathers is dead," Thurmond pledged to do "everything in my power" to support the Republican Party and its conservative presidential nominee, Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona.⁵⁵⁰

The day after his party switch, Thurmond greeted Goldwater on the tarmac at the Greenville-Spartanburg Airport and the two raised their clasped hands in triumph before a delirious crowd of twenty thousand southern Republicans. For the next six weeks, Thurmond crisscrossed the South on behalf of the GOP nominee, emphasizing

⁵⁴⁹ Cohodas, *Strom Thurmond & The Politics of Southern Change*, 359.

⁵⁵⁰ "My Fellow South Carolinians," Strom Thurmond televised speech, delivered on statewide network from Columbia, September 16, 1964.

Goldwater's support for states' rights and his vote against Johnson's civil rights legislation. The Republican candidate would halt the spread of communism, defend individual rights, and "protect law-abiding citizens against riots, looting, and assaults in the streets," the South Carolina senator proclaimed.⁵⁵¹ Some Republican political posters made the racial link more explicit. One depicted a white woman in a torn party dress aided by white police officers. The woman had been had been "seized and beaten by a negro mob" while stopped at a traffic light, the caption read. In bold letters along the bottom, the poster asked southerners to vote for "Barry Goldwater. For States' Rights! For the South!"⁵⁵²

Thurmond's energetic campaigning helped Goldwater win South Carolina and four other Deep South states in the 1964 presidential election. But the Republican nominee's appeal to racial conservatives in the South appeared to be out of step with the consensus building in the rest of the nation. Four months after signing the Civil Rights Act, Johnson and his liberal running mate, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey, won more than 61 percent of the popular vote, the greatest margin of victory in US history. Goldwater captured only one state other than those five he carried in the Deep South, and that one was his native Arizona, which he won by less than one-half percent of the vote. The morning after the election, the *New York Times* said "the white backlash, on which

⁵⁵¹ "Elect Barry Goldwater President of the United States," October 24, 1964. JST Papers: Speeches, Series B, Box 11, folder 131.

⁵⁵² "A Choice for the South," JST Papers: Campaign Series..

Mr. Goldwater had counted so strongly, failed to materialize in most parts of the North.”⁵⁵³

With the passage of the Civil Rights Act, which outlawed segregation in public accommodations, the federal government launched the most comprehensive reforms on behalf of African Americans since Reconstruction. President Kennedy had proposed the measure partly in response to the televised images emanating from Birmingham, Alabama, during the spring of 1963, when the city’s police had used fire hoses and attack dogs to suppress peaceful black marchers. After Kennedy’s assassination, Johnson and Humphrey led the campaign to overcome a filibuster by southern Senators that had stalled the historic bill for nearly a year. On August 6, 1964, as the president signed the measure into law, Johnson linked the battle against legalized segregation in the South to the highest ideals of the American nation. “Our Constitution, the foundation of our republic, forbids it. The principles of our freedom forbid it. Morality forbids it. And the law I sign tonight forbids it,” the president declared.”⁵⁵⁴

A year later, the nation would recoil in horror at more televised images from Alabama, these showing state troopers beating and gassing non-violent black marchers as they crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge outside Selma. The protesters had been marching from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery to demand new laws to protect black voting rights in the South. Although legally obligated to allow blacks to vote by the Fifteenth Amendment, white authorities often erected barriers that prevented African

⁵⁵³ Anthony Lewis, “White Backlash Doesn’t Develop,” *New York Times*, November 6, 1964. 1A.

⁵⁵⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, Remarks Upon Signing of Civil Rights Bill of 1964, Public Papers of the Presidents, University of California-Santa Barbara. Accessed March 12, 2014. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26361&st=&st1=>

Americans from doing so. After the confrontation near Selma, the national television networks interrupted Sunday night primetime programming to broadcast the violent images into the homes of millions of American families. Infuriated by what he saw that night, the president responded a week later in a televised address to Congress that appealed to what he called “the secret heart of America itself.” Echoing Myrdal’s idea of a widely held “American Creed” embracing equality and democracy, Johnson said the founding fathers had established the nation with a special purpose in mind. “The great phrases of that purpose still sound in every American heart, North and South: ‘All men are created equal,’ – ‘government by consent of the governed’ – ‘give me liberty or give me death,’” the president said. To fulfill the nation’s historic mission, Johnson said, Americans must embrace black citizenship and welcome African Americans into the nation’s democratic family. “Their cause must be our cause, too,” he proclaimed. “Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.” Raising his arms in the air, the president stunned even some of his supporters by evoking the spiritual anthem of the civil rights movement. “And we shall overcome,” he said, stretching out each word for effect.⁵⁵⁵

Passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 signaled a turning point in the narrative of American democratic life. The federal government’s intervention on behalf of African Americans in the South effectively ended the Jim Crow era that South Carolina’s “Pitchfork” Ben Tillman had helped usher in more than seventy years earlier. In his various speeches supporting the measures –

⁵⁵⁵Lyndon B. Johnson, Special Message to the Congress – The American Promise, Public Papers of the Presidents, University of California-Santa Barbara. Accessed March 12, 2014. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26805&st=&st1=>

particularly the 1965 address on voting rights – Johnson had used the communicative power of the presidency to integrate the African American quest for equality seamlessly into the larger American story of democracy and freedom. The signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 had institutionalized social and political equality for African Americans. Yet it was the president’s powerful declarations of support, delivered by a former segregationist from the South, that resonated within the culture at the heart of the nation’s democratic life and etched the moment deeply into the nation’s historical narrative.

The African American struggle for freedom across the twentieth century demonstrates how the civil sphere’s ever-present potential to produce solidarity and justice by generating “social criticism and democratic integration at the same time.”⁵⁵⁶ Members of an out group that had been denied citizenship rights had launched a protest movement that appealed to the nation’s most sacred ideals of justice, liberty, and equality. Using mass media to highlight their commitment to freedom against the uncivil and anti-democratic acts of their oppressors, the movement gradually built a coalition of empathetic allies within the larger society. The effort had started slowly, and it required the growth of black communicative institutions before the movement could gain traction within white society. Eventually – as the voices of protest spread and their interpretations of public events burrowed deeper into the cultural mainstream – the discrepancy between the ideals of the “American creed” and the reality of the nation’s civic life became impossible to ignore. Support for the out-group expanded, and public opinion reached a tipping point. Whether for reasons of morality or ambition, those at the highest levels of

⁵⁵⁶ Alexander, *The Civil Sphere*, 4.

the nation's political and economic structure felt compelled to support the cause. In March 1965 – almost exactly one hundred years after the end of Lincoln's war against the slave-holding South – Johnson's speech before both houses of Congress welcomed all African Americans as full-fledged members of the national civil sphere.

While that last sentence is true, it is also far too simple and triumphant to capture the complexity at the heart of modern democratic life. The civil sphere is a contested space, where outcomes are often contradictory and ambiguous. Just as it offers a means for civic repair, the civil sphere also offers opportunities for civic rupture. In the United States, one group's victory may appear to settle old arguments for good, but inevitably new battle lines emerge, with fresh interpretations used to generate another round of debate over the meaning of citizenship and the boundaries of the American democracy.

By late summer of 1965, that debate over the meaning of the civil rights movement and African American citizenship had resumed in earnest. In June, in a commencement address at Howard University, a flagship institution of African American higher education, Johnson expanded the government's commitment to civil rights beyond the strictly legal issues of segregation and voting rights. Declaring that "freedom is not enough," the president said blacks deserved economic help as well. "You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want and do as you desire and choose the leaders you please," the president told the Howard graduates. "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race, and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair." The president said his

administration would seek “not just equality as a right and a theory but equality as a fact and equality as a result.”⁵⁵⁷

Johnson promised a new government push to aid black economic advancement as part of what he called “the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights.”⁵⁵⁸ Yet his Howard speech rallied critics who believed Johnson’s commitment to “equality of result,” rather than “equality of opportunity,” amounted to special treatment for African Americans. The effort to achieve social, legal, and political equality for blacks had resonated with the sense of fairness associated with the “American way.” Conservative critics would interpret Johnson’s commitment to “equality of results” to mean just the opposite – an un-American effort to stack the deck in favor of one group of citizens over others. The early criticism of the Howard speech laid the groundwork for the conservative assault on affirmative action programs the following decade. The issue would play a significant role in attracting new white supporters to the conservative movement across the 1970s and 1980s.

On August 11, 1965, just one week after Johnson signed the historic Voting Rights Act, the Los Angeles community of Watts erupted in flames. During four days of violence, thirty-four people died and property valued in the millions of dollars was destroyed. The tension between the black residents of Watts and the white law enforcement officers of Los Angeles had been building for years. But for most American television viewers, the violent images were shocking and discordant. Five months earlier,

⁵⁵⁷ Lyndon B. Johnson, “To Fulfill These Rights,” Howard University Commencement Address, June 4, 1965, LBJ Presidential Library. Accessed April 12, 2014.

<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp>

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

they had seen white state troopers in Alabama beat and gas peaceful black marchers near Selma. Since then, Congress had answered the protesters' pleas with sweeping voting rights reforms in the South, and the nation's president, a white southerner, had aligned himself closely with the black struggle for equality. Yet in Watts, African Americans appeared to be burning down a city neighborhood and threatening to kill those who got in their way. Los Angeles television station KTLA pioneered the use of a helicopter in local news coverage during the early 1960s, and the station delivered stunning live images of the mayhem that were seen across the nation. As one historian noted: "After Watts, the legions of moderate whites who had been so recently demanding justice for the meek, Christ-like demonstrators at Selma began melting away."⁵⁵⁹

The unraveling of the nation's liberal consensus during the traumatic events of the 1960s has been well documented.⁵⁶⁰ Johnson's Howard speech would mark the pinnacle of his administration's public commitment to civil rights. During his final three years in office, the escalation of the war in Vietnam would dominate news coverage and spawn an increasingly aggressive anti-war movement. At the same time, the fracturing of the civil rights movement, the rise of black power leaders, and the violence that followed the King assassination would alter white perceptions of the African American freedom struggle. As historian David C. Carter notes, television furthered the goals of the civil rights movement in the South through the Selma campaign in 1965, but in the three years that

⁵⁵⁹ Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2009).

⁵⁶⁰ See, for example: Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Godfrey Hodgson, *America in Our Time*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1976); Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*.

followed the images of blacks rioting in northern cities angered white viewers.⁵⁶¹ This so-called white backlash set the stage for political realignment, with moderate and conservative whites in the North and the former segregationists in the South abandoning the Democrats to join the conservative Republican Party. Riding the crest of the backlash, the GOP bounced back from the Goldwater rout in 1964 to gain Congressional seats in the 1966 mid-term elections and to win the White House in 1968. By the late 1970s, the conservative counterrevolution that William F. Buckley envisioned back in the late 1950s – and that South Carolina’s leading white journalists helped him build – would take firm control of the GOP under Ronald Reagan’s leadership and would come to dominate American politics over the next three decades.

Historians have debated the role of race in the rise of the modern conservative movement, particularly its role in the “great white switch” – the decision by white southerners to leave the Democratic Party and join the GOP. In 1995, Dan T. Carter produced an influential interpretation of the backlash thesis in his book *The Politics of Rage*, a biography of former Alabama governor and presidential candidate George Wallace. Carter maintained that Wallace’s brand of ultra-conservatism had tapped into the fears of whites in the North and the South who saw their world undergoing rapid change. In the mid-1960s, Wallace had catered primarily to their racial fears, Carter maintains, but by the late 1960s he had begun to avoid overt racism and attack a wider range of targets – anti-war protesters, welfare recipients, government bureaucrats. The decision to downplay race was a cosmetic one, Carter contends. Wallace continued to

⁵⁶¹ David C. Carter, *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965-1968* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 26.

scapegoat African Americans to fuel white resentment, but he delivered his message indirectly, often using a type of code that intertwined race with other issues. Blatantly racist rhetoric was no longer acceptable, but Wallace found that his message of resentment was more popular than ever. As Carter put it, “The politics of rage that George Wallace made his own had moved from the fringes of our society to center stage.”⁵⁶²

In the past decade, a new group of historians has emerged to question whether race was the dominant issue driving the rise of the conservative Republican Party in the South. Joseph Crespino, author of a book about political change in his native Mississippi, says placing too much emphasis on the backlash thesis attributes to white racism “a mystical, ahistorical quality that explains everything and, thus, explains nothing very well.” He maintains that economic and religious issues were at least as important as race in pushing white southerners away from the Democratic Party.⁵⁶³ In his study of suburban and urban whites in Atlanta, Richmond and Charlotte, Matthew D. Lassiter argues that members of the “silent majority” in the South opposed “massive resistance” leaders who wanted to close public schools to avoid integration in the late 1950s and early 60s.⁵⁶⁴ Yet they also rejected the bi-racial Democratic coalition that emerged in the early 1970s because they did not trust it to protect their economic prosperity. Two political scientists, Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, take the argument against the backlash thesis

⁵⁶² Dan. T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 468.

⁵⁶³ Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 12.

⁵⁶⁴ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2006).

even further. Their analysis of voting data maintains that race had little to do with partisan realignment in the South in the years after the civil rights movement. White southern voters had embraced the low-tax, small-government arguments of Republican conservatives, they argue.⁵⁶⁵

During the 1970s, economic, religious, and cultural issues clearly played significant roles in attracting white southerners to the conservative movement. In 1974, the US Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion nationwide politicized white evangelicals in the South, and their growing cultural antipathy to the rising women's movement led them into the conservative wing of the Republican Party. Moreover, the economic trauma created by the oil shortages of the mid-1970s and the escalating interest rates during the Carter administration angered white voters in the prosperous and growing suburbs of the Sunbelt. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian hostage crisis added to their concerns about the Democratic Party's leadership.

Yet political change is driven as much by rhetoric as by events on the ground. It is the interpretation of those public events that alter perceptions and help citizens make sense of their world. A close look at the role of leading segregationists in South Carolina reveals the centrality of the racial issue in transforming the Republican Party into what New Hampshire editor William Loeb called the "white man's party."⁵⁶⁶ The conservative voices in the state's major white newspapers had been complaining about the growth of

⁵⁶⁵ Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

⁵⁶⁶ William Loeb to J. Edward Thornton, June 7, 1961; J. Edward Thornton to William Loeb, June 9, 1961, WDW Papers: Civil Rights, Correspondence, 1961.

the federal government since the early days of the New Deal. Yet their argument never gained broad public support in the state until the late 1940s, when President Truman came out strongly in favor of civil rights reform in the South. After the *Brown* ruling in 1954, the state's white political leaders, working closely with key journalists, developed a rhetoric of "massive resistance" that linked the call for racial equality to the growth of a tyrannical and oppressive federal government. As one editor had written, "civil rights" would inevitably lead to "socialism."⁵⁶⁷ By the early 1960s, when it was clear that massive resistance would fail and that blacks were gaining strength within the Democratic Party, key segregationist leaders embraced a new strategy. The state's best-known journalists – Thomas R. Waring and William D. Workman of the *Charleston News and Courier* – joined forces with a small group of economic conservatives to build a viable Republican Party in the state. It was this union of segregationists and small-government conservatism that laid the foundation for the party's dramatic growth in the South Carolina and the nation over the next two decades. As Dan T. Carter contends, "even though the streams of racial and economic conservatism have sometimes flowed in separate channels, they ultimately joined in the political coalition that reshaped American politics."⁵⁶⁸

After his failed Senate race in 1962, Workman returned to journalism, this time as editorial page editor at *The State* in Columbia. He and Waring now controlled two of the three largest newspapers in South Carolina, and they would use their positions to help

⁵⁶⁷ William Watts Ball, "Civil Rights and Socialism," *Charleston News and Courier*, January 7, 1949, 4A.

⁵⁶⁸ Dan T. Carter. *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race and the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994*. (Louisiana State University Press, 1996), xiv.

develop a new rhetorical strategy to maintain white political control through the Republican Party. This new strategy would accept a certain measure of black equality as inevitable. Yet it would develop a political language of what historians have termed “color-blind conservatism” as a means of delegitimizing black political activism and preserving white political power.⁵⁶⁹

Alexander’s theory of the civil sphere helps explain the power of this new Republican rhetoric. Alexander contends that successful political communication eventually links public issues back to the core democratic ideals embedded in the nation’s historical memory. These “deep cultural codes” convey the nation’s democratic values across society and help citizens distinguish civil from uncivil acts.⁵⁷⁰ By the early 1960s, the African American civil rights movement had successfully linked its call for social and political equality with the nation’s sense of democratic fairness and civility.

Segregationists who used overtly racist arguments found themselves on the wrong side of history. William F. Buckley had discovered this with his 1957 editorial, “Why the South Must Prevail,” which opposed black voting rights in the South and drew harsh criticism, even from fellow conservatives.⁵⁷¹ In the mid-1960s, Waring, Workman, and the rising conservative movement in South Carolina moved away from strictly racial arguments and employed more subtle language that intertwined race with issues of law and order, electoral integrity, and economic fairness. The color-blind strategy accepted black

⁵⁶⁹ For more on color-blind conservatism, see: Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 4-5; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of History,” *Journal of American History*, 91, 4, March 2005, 1233-1263; Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*, 9-10.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 53-61.

⁵⁷¹ William F. Buckley, Jr., “Why the South Must Prevail,” *National Review*, August 24, 1957.

success in joining the nation's civil sphere, but suggested that any future consideration of the nation's racial history was an uncivil act that violated the core values of the democracy.

Waring's tone on the editorial page of the *Charleston News and Courier* reflected this shift in strategy. In 1957, in a front-page editorial, he denounced Eisenhower's civil rights bill as a "force bill" that would require "race-mixing" and initiate an era of bloodshed across the South. But in 1964, when Johnson signed a much stronger bill, the editor made no direct prediction of racial violence. He merely urged its readers to remain calm, avoid confrontation, and accept the law. But he suggested that the battle over public opinion was not over. Yes, "the Negro leaders and their allies have won enactment of the law they strove so hard to get," Waring said, but no one should celebrate until "the effects of the Civil Rights Act become clear, and until the mood of the entire country – not just the Southern states – begins to jell."⁵⁷²

Since becoming editor in 1951, Waring had been arguing that "race mixing" would inevitably lead to violence, and that the civil rights movements, particularly the acts of civil disobedience led by Martin Luther King, Jr., would somehow encourage black lawlessness in the North. Once that happened, he contended, northern public opinion would turn in favor of white southerners. As he explained his strategy to a white citizens' council leader, Waring said he believed the "explosions now making up in Northern ghettos will take the liberal's mind off the South."⁵⁷³

⁵⁷² "A Time of Testing," *Charleston News and Courier*, July 4, 1964.

⁵⁷³ Waring to Bill Simmons, January 23, 1963. Thomas R. Waring Papers: Correspondence, 1963.

Former segregationists such as Waring, Workman, and Richmond editor James J. Kilpatrick would play leading roles in interpreting the racial disturbances in Watts and other northern cities as uncivil acts by African Americans who were unwilling to play by the rules of democratic life. After passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, they would express support for African American voting rights. But they would claim that efforts to abolish educational and other requirements that had been used to restrict black voting in the past were anti-democratic and would encourage fraud. As Workman would note in *The State*, African Americans who wanted to remove voting restrictions “were seeking preferential treatment.” If successful, they would “damage the entire fabric” of the nation’s democratic system of governance, he said.⁵⁷⁴

By the late 1970s, the conservative movement would take firm control of the GOP under Ronald Reagan’s leadership. Reagan’s conservative coalition would unite southern segregationists who had supported Goldwater’s 1964 bid with the growing legions of white northerners who were repelled by the chaos they saw on their television screens to create a political movement that would come to dominant American politics over the next three decades. Reagan would prove to be a master of coded rhetoric that referred to race without mentioning the term. In 1980, he launched his general election campaign at the Neshoba County Fair in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Sixteen years earlier, during the Mississippi Freedom Summer, when black and white civil rights workers poured into the state, three activists had been murdered in Neshoba County and buried in an earthen dam. In September 1980, Reagan came to Neshoba County to declare that his support for “states’ rights.” Thirty two years earlier, in 1948, Strom Thurmond had headed the

⁵⁷⁴ “Heat and Passion,” *The State*, March 13, 1965, 12A.

presidential campaign of the States' Rights Democratic Party – the Dixiecrats. Thurmond maintained that he ran to protect the constitutional rights of the states against federal intrusion, not to protest Truman's civil rights proposals. Yet his claim that “no army is large enough” to force racial mixing in the South suggested otherwise.

It was a political strategist from South Carolina who helped pioneer the use of coded language to inject race into political debate. Lee Atwater served as White House political director under Reagan and as chief strategist for President George H.W. Bush's 1988 campaign. In a 1981 interview with political scientist Alexander Lamis, Atwater explained the evolution of coded language in Republican political campaigns in the South. “You start out in 1954 by saying, ‘nigger, nigger, nigger.’ By 1968 you can't say ‘nigger’ – that hurts you, backfires,” Atwater said. “So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights, and all that stuff.”⁵⁷⁵

Consider the coded language that Reagan and conservatives used to describe federal assistance programs for the poor. Although Reagan never actually used the term “welfare queen,” he delivered frequent rants against “a woman on the south side of Chicago” who received government aid but drove around town in a Cadillac.⁵⁷⁶ It was a rhetorical flourish that overstated the problem of welfare fraud and was used to depict urban blacks as lazy, shiftless, and unwilling to carry their proper burden as US citizens.

⁵⁷⁵ Atwater spoke with Lamis and a colleague on condition that his name not be used. Lamis used material from the interview without attributing it to Atwater in: Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 1990). After Atwater died, Lamis used quotations from the interview with attribution to Atwater in a 1999 book that he edited: Alexander P. Lamis, ed., *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1999).

⁵⁷⁶ For a deeper inquiry into the issue of welfare fraud, see: David Zucchino, *The Myth of the Welfare Queen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999).

It was a trope that would be repeated frequently by conservatives. A version could be heard in 1994, when US Representative Newt Gingrich contrasted “the pristine work ethic” of his overwhelmingly white suburban district with what he called the “welfare values” of the mostly black city of Atlanta.⁵⁷⁷ Later that year, Gingrich led a sweeping Republican victory that won control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1954 – and completed the South’s transformation into a stronghold of the new GOP.

Republicans dispute the centrality of race in the party’s rise to prominence over the past four decades. They note correctly that economic and social issues have played a significant role. What gets obscured, however, is the way those issues have been “racialized” in the discourse of American politics. The debate over government spending often focuses on welfare and social programs – which are inaccurately assumed to be primarily “black” initiatives – and ignore mortgage and health-care insurance tax deductions and other more expensive entitlements that benefit middle and upper-class families. Even marginal efforts to offset a history of inequality through race-based affirmative action programs are depicted as uncivil, and those who support such efforts in public discourse are labeled as anti-democratic and un-American. Civil sphere theory offers a framework to better understand how such cultural interpretations shape political outcomes.

Alexander’s theory is not without its critics. His view of political change in democratic societies emphasizes persuasion over power – an argument that some scholars

⁵⁷⁷ Peter Applebome. *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics and Culture*. (New York Times Books. 1996.)

find naïve and simplistic. Aldon Morris, for example, argues that the civil rights movement won concessions from dominant white society only after it was clear the movement had the power to disrupt society. Civil rights groups in the North and the South threatened the economic interests of white capitalists, Morris argues, and these powerful business leaders forced the dominant white society to accept change. “The black masses generated real economic and political leverage, and that power served as the primary direct force of social change,” Morris contends.⁵⁷⁸ He disputes Alexander’s claim that Northern white journalists provided sympathetic interpretations of the civil rights movement. Morris claims white journalists ignored the black movement’s non-violent strategy and focused instead on conflict and disruption. It was the threat of more disruption that eventually forced the federal government to intervene.

Morris contends that Alexander’s civil sphere theory overstates the ability of cultural “soft” power to defeat material “hard” power, and downplays the role of African Americans in their own liberation by granting so much power to the interpretive function of the white Northern press. Morris believes there was little difference between the North and South on the racial issue, and that it is naïve to argue that a white Northern civil sphere actually embraced the black freedom movement. White northerners accepted change in the South because the alternative appeared to be endless and perhaps escalating disruptions, and because elimination of Jim Crow laws in the South would have little impact on daily life in the North.

⁵⁷⁸ Aldon Morris, “Naked Power and *The Civil Sphere*,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 48 (2007): 616.

Alexander argues that Morris misunderstands the roles of cultural and instrumental power in furthering social movements within a democratic nation. The “power of the masses,” he contends, can succeed only if the power is deemed to be civil and thus “to represent the common good.”⁵⁷⁹ If not, society will determine the social movement to be uncivil and will allow the use of force to deny the group’s demands for inclusion. Alexander refers to the urban riots and black liberation rhetoric of the 1960s as examples of failed attempts to use disruption to gain concessions from society. In a democratic nation, he argues, the use of disruption must be “staged, framed, and interpreted” in a way that allows the out-group to make an emotional and empathetic connection with allies among the dominant group. If members of the in-group see the disruption as a threat and nothing more, they will close ranks and use their superior numbers and greater instrumental power to enforce the status quo.

Morris joins Elizabeth S. Clemens and Robert J. Antonio in casting doubt on a tenant at the heart of civil sphere theory: that is it possible for influential members of a dominant group to empathize with an out-group.⁵⁸⁰ Can those in a dominant position in society connect emotionally and empathetically with members of an out-group? Are dominant group members susceptible to cultural persuasion? Or do they cede power and exclusivity only by force? Alexander argues that nations with autonomous civil spheres are open to civil persuasion. In his view, dominant groups in these societies maintain a “paradoxical adherence to the civil code.”⁵⁸¹ The elites who hold power and the members

⁵⁷⁹ Alexander, “Interpretation of *The Civil Sphere*,” *The Sociological Quarterly*, 650.

⁵⁸⁰ Elizabeth S. Clemens, “Of Tactics and Traumas,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 48, 2007, 589-599; Robert J. Antonio, “Locating *The Civil Sphere*,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 48, 2007: 601-613.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid*, 646.

of their group work to “purify” and “civilize” their status by creating narratives that defend their dominance. Through these interpretations, they begin to sincerely believe that those who are outside their group deserve their lower status. They are uncivil, and thus not worthy of inclusion in the solidarity of the civil sphere. These conflicts over hierarchy and status in society are ones of interpretation, Alexander argues, and cultural persuasion can alter how members of a dominant group interpret their position. When an out-group delivers a powerful message that identifies the dominant group as uncivil, connections can be made, and minds within the dominant group can be changed, Alexander argues.⁵⁸² During the civil right movement, the white Northern press delivered such a message on behalf of black Southerners. Alexander maintains it was this interpretation of events, disseminated by the Northern press, that connected with members of the white dominant group in the northern civil sphere and forced the white South to accept change.

By focusing so intently on the power of the white Northern press to produce empathy among white northerners, critics contend Alexander dismisses the agency of the black protesters. Shouldn't black civil rights activists in the South get the credit for forcing the white South to change? Alexander dismisses this criticism. During the civil rights movement, he argues, the white Southern press tried to portray black protests as anticivil disruptions that threatened the nation. But the white northern press interpreted the protests as civil acts in the best tradition of American democracy, and depicted the white southerners as the anti-democratic forces in the civic morality play. Alexander believes the symbolic power of the binary cultural codes helped African American win

⁵⁸² Ibid, 646-647.

key allies within the civil sphere and thus force the white segregations to concede. Yet he argues that his theory is not minimizing the work of heroic civil rights leaders and the black communities that challenged white hegemony in the South at the risk of death. It was their brilliant and dangerous work, he claims, that persuaded white citizens in the North to join the cause and demand political change. He also points out that he documents the development of a vibrant black counterpublic as a key necessity that precludes the rise of a functioning social movement. It was the courageous work of black activists who organized their communities and staged dramatic displays of civil action that won support in the national civil sphere, Alexander contends. The white press interpreted these protest acts as civil actors confronting uncivil, undemocratic forces in the South, he says, but they did so in response to the courageous black leaders who scripted these morality plays and risked their lives to carry them out.

Finally, critics raise doubts about the binary codes that Alexander considers central to civil sphere. Where do these codes come from, and, as Clemens asks, is it “necessarily the case that societies are organized” around such symbolic codes? Alexander contends the binary codes – civil vs. uncivil – are part of the cultural structure of the civil sphere. He notes that scholars have no trouble accepting the existence of structures in other aspects of society – capitalist markets, for example, or religious organizations. But Alexander believes they are unwilling to find similar structures in cultural life. The codes, he argues, are autonomous structures that developed with the emergence of modern democratic nation-states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The “binary discourse” that grows out of the symbolic codes helps “inform and organize

the patterned conflicts and understandings of civil spheres.”⁵⁸³ The simple binaries of civil vs. uncivil and good vs. evil are deployed, Alexander maintains, whenever the “aspirations” of civil society come into play. They have been used repeatedly by independent and self-regulating societies when they fear the forces of irrationality, dependence, and despotism, he says. The codes are derived from “out there... in the real world,” Alexander claims, not from the works of scholars and philosophers. In the United States, they can be found throughout history, from the fights between Jefferson and the Federalists in 1800 through the Obama-McCain debates over the future of the nation in 2008.⁵⁸⁴

In the 1930s, John Henry McCray and William D. Workman longed to join just such a debate in their home state of South Carolina. In 1935, when McCray returned to Charleston from college, he confronted a culture of nearly unquestioned white supremacy in his home state. To fight back, he launched a newspaper and began to deliver his own interpretation of public events. One year later, in 1936, Workman dropped out of law school in Washington, D.C., and also returned home. Workman said he knew he wanted to work in “government and politics” in some way, but not as a lawyer.⁵⁸⁵ Instead, he sought a job at a newspaper. Both McCray and Workman seemed to understand just how closely the press was intertwined with the nation’s political life. Newspapers delivered more than mere facts; they sorted and interpreted those facts, and in doing so they helped their readers make meaning of the world around them. Over the next three decades, McCray, Workman, and their colleagues in the black and white press would join the

⁵⁸³ Ibid, 644.

⁵⁸⁴ Jeffrey C. Alexander, *The Performance of Politics: Obama’s Victory and the Democratic Struggle for Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵⁸⁵ Unpublished essay. WDW Papers: Personal.

debate within the civil sphere over the meaning of citizenship and the boundaries of American democracy. As much as any politician, their newspapers would operate at the heart of the nation's civic life.

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