

TO GIVE RACISM THE FACE OF THE IGNORANT: RACE, CLASS, AND
WHITE MANHOOD IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA, 1937-1970

By

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To Sam and Eloise

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Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
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1937-1970

By

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Chair: Dr. William Link

Major: History

To Give Racism the Face of the Ignorant: Race, Class, and White Manhood in Birmingham, 1937-1970 examines how white men in Birmingham, Alabama responded to the black freedom struggle across the middle of the twentieth century. By tracking how men in the laboring-, middle-, and upper-class organized across class and race in different moments, this study demonstrates that economic insecurity did not determine devotion to white supremacy. Instead, I argue that male supremacy was embedded within southern segregation and that the imperiled position of the white male in society became the overriding ideology of white resistance. Using the time frame of the long civil rights movement, this study charts how the gendered underpinnings of racial supremacy - masculine privilege, traditional gender roles, and the insistence of the superiority of white, Protestant morality - continued into the 1960s among working -, middle-, and upper-class whites in Birmingham.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

“The South stands for something,” boasted North Alabama Citizens’ Council leader Asa Earl Carter to his Birmingham radio listeners in 1956. Carter’s voice was warm, and he spoke slowly with a deep Alabama accent. “Like an old veteran said to me, ‘The spirit of the southland has a mighty peculiar way of livin’ on’ . . . and that it does.” Born and raised in the small town of Oxford, near Talladega, Carter absorbed the resentments of poor whites in Alabama in his youth and successfully tapped into these feelings as a vocal white supremacist in Birmingham. Over the radio, he urged his audience to remain faithful to racial segregation and to dismiss those who “relegated loyalty to segregation to the ranks of the ignorant.” Reminding his listeners of their ancestral kin, Carter called for the return of an older version of southern manhood, men who “set their jaw against iron might and tyranny and came out on top for the race they determined to save.”¹ While propagating a racially intolerant model of southern manhood, Carter rejected the discursive fusion of white resistance and ignorance. He was not alone.

In 1958, southern writer and philosopher James McBride Dabbs sat for an interview with CBS’s Mike Wallace to discuss the civil rights movement and southern white resistance. Dabbs, who often referred to the region as “God’s Project,” argued against the notion, promulgated by southern society’s leaders and upper echelon, that poor, ignorant whites drove white backlash: “The theory that the lower strata of society

¹ Asa Earl Carter, “Essays of Asa Carter 1956, album,” Asa Carter Papers, Collection 1265, Box 1, Folder 2, Birmingham Public Library Archives Department, hereafter BPLAD.

can control society and tell the upper class what to do is nonsense."² In 1995, southern historian Charles Payne addressed a similar problem in the historiography of the era: by "giving racism the face of the ignorant, the pot-bellied, and the tobacco chewing, an image with which no one can identify," historians, he wrote, fail to understand the totality and complexity of southern racism.³ Reflecting on the meaning of race in the region, Dabbs explained, the South "faces everything with the feeling that deep down she is going to lose" and the "elevated status that came along with white skin was a very important feeling to the white man of the South."⁴

In retrospect, both Carter and Dabbs addressed matters which concerned race as well as those of gender. The appeal of massive resistance in the 1950s and early 1960s can be located squarely in the nexus between racial and gendered anxieties of the era.⁵ In Birmingham, Alabama, a city made famous by its violent resistance, a confluence of factors took shape in the middle of the twentieth century that threatened the power of the white male. Birmingham's men watched as women increasingly joined the workforce and as their young took part in an overtly sexualized and rebellious youth culture. In the same era, working-class men encountered dwindling job opportunities as machines replaced them in mines and mills and white-collared men faced a slowing

² James McBride Dabbs, interview by Mike Wallace. CBS, 31 August 1958, transcript located in Ransom Center online collections, University of Texas at Austin, archives, <http://www.hrc.utexas.edu/collections/film/holdings/wallace/> (December 2010).

³ Charles Payne, *I've Got The Light Of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 418. Payne's interest in the complexity of white segregationists began with John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi*, (Urbana - Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

⁴ Dabbs, interview, CBS.

⁵ K. A. Cuordileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis of American Masculinity, 1949–1960," *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000):515-545.

economy and a tenuous future in a city with shrinking prospects.⁶ In the midst of job insecurity and patriarchal challenges from working women and wild children, Birmingham's white men witnessed the genesis of a strong grassroots freedom struggle and, with it, resounding claims of black manhood.⁷ In the 1950s, for the first time since Reconstruction, white male control could no longer be taken for granted in the steel city.

As in much of the South, racial enlightenment and racial animus are understood to be the effects of class in Birmingham across the twentieth century. Harper Lee's Bob Ewell and Atticus Finch are the most poignant examples of Alabama's male archetypes which have come to symbolize the cultural marriage between racial sentiment and class, although southern history is brimming with poor, ignorant racists and well-to-do, well-intentioned moderates. The images of both were images of men. And while violence had a correlative in class in Birmingham between 1937 and 1970, devotion to white supremacy did not. We have mistaken practice with purpose.

This dissertation examines racial feeling among white men in Birmingham during the black freedom struggle with an eye toward socioeconomic differences.⁸ Specifically,

⁶ The struggling economy of Birmingham was especially frustrating for residents of Birmingham because many other Sunbelt cities were expanding in this era. This is a consistent concern of the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, so much so that by 1960, a metropolitan audit was conducted to search for a way to make Birmingham a more productive city. *The Birmingham Metropolitan Audit: Preliminary Report, 1960* (Louisville: Southern Institute of Management, 1960).

⁷ For a discussion of how claims of manhood have influenced identity politics, see John Tosh, "What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on nineteenth-century Britain," *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 38 (1994); Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau, eds. *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*, (New York: Routledge, 2001); Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Robert Morrell, "Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies." *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, (Dec., 1998), pp. 605-630; Thembisa Waetjen, *Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

⁸ Necessarily, this project addresses difference across the white male community but ignores others. The subjects are white men from every major socio-economic group in Birmingham. Many were born and

this study explores the relationship between class and devotion to white supremacy in Birmingham, Alabama. On account of the city's reputation as a conglomerate of "just a lot of goddamn white trash," the primary goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the image of the blue-collar racist has overshadowed racial bigotry among middle- and upper-class whites.⁹ I argue throughout that Birmingham's working-class whites wavered in their fidelity to segregation between 1937 and 1970.¹⁰ Although there were many men, such as Asa Carter and Bull Connor, who typified the "working-class man as white supremacist" stereotype, racial feeling in Birmingham was neither manifest nor encapsulated within an economic stratum of society. Additionally, this study details the history of white-collared men working for segregation and "racial purity" from the 1930s to the late 1960s; a process obscured in history by the southern iconography of racists with white hoods and blue collars.

The most influential body of scholarship concerning the responses of the southern middle-class to the civil rights movement examines the motivations and impact of "white

raised in Birmingham while others migrated from the hills of Appalachia or emigrated from Europe. Almost of the subjects, however, are Protestant even though Birmingham did have vibrant Jewish and Catholic communities during the period under study.

⁹ "Where the Stars Fall," *Time Magazine*, 27 September 1963, 27-29.

¹⁰ For a survey of recent monographs published on southern white reactions to the black freedom struggle, see Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Glenn Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1997); Andrew Moore, "Practicing What We Preach: Roman Catholics and the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 89 (Fall 2005); Michael Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 81-118; Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932 – 1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown," *Journal of American History* 91 (2004): 119-144; Glenn Feldman and Patricia Sullivan, *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2004).

flight” from southern cities to southern suburbs.¹¹ Kevin Kruse, Mathew Lassiter, and Joseph Crespino, the important contributors to this recent trend in southern historiography, have provided responses to Payne’s lamentations about the oversimplification of southern racism. For wealthier whites, suburbanization preserved Jim Crow in the decades following racial integration and the scholarship on southern suburbanization and the rise of the Right have identified important connections between wealth and the persistence of racial segregation.

Even as a race-neutral but race-based language of rights, according to Kruse and Lassiter, emanated from the suburbs, historians are yet to explain why the middle class had a reason to hate.¹² This gap in the historiography of the South neglects and effectually erases the complicity of wealthier whites in massive resistance. We are left with stock images of white-collared men wringing their hands, wrinkled and worn from their fight for southern progress juxtaposed with those of their lessers - blue-collared and short-sleeved men, digging in their heels, setting their jaws, projecting “an intestinal fortitude” to preserve the southland and stem the rising tide of integration.¹³ While the

¹¹ Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Mathew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006; See also Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc, 2006); Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). While Kruse, Lassiter, Crespino, and others are the first to look at the politics of southern suburbanization, these southern historians are localizing a trend begun by Kenneth Jackson’s *Crabgrass Frontier*, Thomas Sugrue’s *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*, and Lisa McGirr’s *Suburban Warriors*. Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); (Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹² Lisa McGirr discusses a similar trend in Orange County, California in her monograph, *Suburban Warriors*.

¹³ For a study on Hollywood representations of the oversimplification of the South, see Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

recent scholarship has deepened our understanding of the southern and national drift of middle-class whites to the Right, working-class whites and all of the assumptions about them have remained intact. My examination of whites in Birmingham, while documenting the politics and influence of men living in suburbia, largely remains in the city to document how poorer whites reacted to and thought about integration from the 1930s to the 1960s. This study suggests that our ideas about middle-class moderates and working-class bigots are not only oversimplified, but largely inaccurate.

A second theme of this study concerns the methods by which white supremacists in Birmingham made ideas and ideals about southern masculinity functional for their cause. Historians Tim Tyson, Steve Estes, and Danielle McGuire have demonstrated that manhood was central to the civil rights movement: each has examined the ways in which the freedom struggle was redemptive for black masculinity.¹⁴ This study moves from the understanding that southern racial manhood was dialogically constructed, that black men pressed “continually upon the mind and the character” of southern white manhood.¹⁵ When black men moved out of their “place,” white men in Birmingham reacted to affirm their own sense of self. In response to the civil rights movement, southern leaders infused the political lexicon with a vocabulary of personal, masculine identity. The power of the white male as the political and social arbiter of southern society was deeply embedded within the culture of segregation. While anxieties surrounding the “abdicated male” of the 1950s propelled southern men to stake their

¹⁴ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999).

¹⁵ James McBride Dabbs, *Who Speaks for the South?* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1964), xi.

claim most forcefully atop both the gender and racial hierarchy, white supremacy was not simply a by-product of male insecurity. In Birmingham, segregationists created a compelling world view that bound together disparate cultural values including racial purity, traditional gender norms, and Protestant probity under one singular vision.¹⁶ Southern, white men, rich and poor, became the defenders of this vision.

The fight for segregation did not promise different things to men collared in white and those in blue – it promised the same thing to all men, control - control which surpassed notions of white over black to include men over women and fathers over children. Although women assumed active roles, white resistance was entirely comprised of male prerogatives. By charting the arc of massive resistance among white men in what Martin Luther King referred to as “the most rotten city in America,” this study makes clear that constructions of southern, white manhood enabled wealthy whites to direct and sustain racial antagonism and then distance themselves from it as they lived, learned, and worshipped in total segregation.

In their work on the cultural underpinnings of white supremacy, historians Samuel Hill, Dewey Grantham, Amy Wood, Leonard Moore, Jane Dailey, and Anders Walker have each carefully detailed how southerners used religion and morality to sanctify traditional gender and race relations in the first half of the twentieth century. Wood’s recent monograph on lynching explores how southern evangelical Protestantism and public executions dovetailed to affirm the collective identity of the witnesses as

¹⁶ Leonard Moore also discusses this type of traditional populist ideology in his work on the Klan in Indiana in the 1920s to testify to power of the anti-modern sentiment which was rooted in smaller communities across America. Leonard Moore, *Citizen Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

righteous Christians.¹⁷ Similarly, Leonard Moore examines the power of religion in white supremacy in his study of the Klan in the 1920s. Moore argues that the seeds of the modern Right - traditional gender roles, evangelical Protestantism, xenophobia, and white supremacy - took root during the second wave of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s.¹⁸ Moving forward to the civil rights era, Jane Dailey and Anders Walker demonstrate that southern whites employed Christianity and appeals to white morality to rationalize resistance to integration. Dailey examines the role of religion in the backlash against *Brown v. Board of Education* while Walker charts the ways in which moderate southerners used issues of morality to defend the status quo by means of aspiration, rather than repression.¹⁹ The relationship between religion and segregation does not reappear in the historiography of white resistance in the South beyond the backlash of the 1950s, however.²⁰ I argue that conservative Christianity with its emphasis on prescriptive gender roles and moral cleanliness continued to “do the work” of white, male supremacy into the 1960s in Birmingham.

The black freedom struggle forced white men to surrender certain aspects of white supremacy, but not all. I contend that the gendered aspects of white supremacy persisted in Birmingham, most notably the perpetual insistence on the Christian and

¹⁷ Amy Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Leonard J. Moore, “Good Old-Fashioned New Social History and the Twentieth-Century American Right,” *Reviews in American History* 24, No. 4 (Dec., 1996): 555-573.

¹⁹ Walker Anders, *The Ghost of Jim Crow: how Southern Moderates Used Brown v. Board of Education to Stall Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁰ Samuel Hill, *Religion and the Solid South* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972); Jane Dailey, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” *Journal of American History* 91 (2004):119-144; Amy Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*; Dewey Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History*. (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1992).

moral supremacy of the fairly complected. This project charts how the Movement changed white men in Birmingham, as well as the ways in which white supremacy continued under the guise of what one local reverend called white-collared “Christian supremacy.”²¹ By bringing an analysis of southern, white masculinity into the study of racial supremacy, the role of Christianity, the coveted position of white women, and the angst with which southern men responded to peaceful protests comes into focus more clearly. Most significantly, a deeper understanding of the means by which *all* white men benefitted from the cultural constellation of white supremacy weakens the assertion that resistance sprung most passionately from the economically marginalized.

Birmingham, Alabama is at the center of this dissertation for two reasons – the infamy of its white resistance and the neatly ordered class structure in the city. Birmingham’s attack on the Freedom Riders in 1961, Bull Connor’s police dogs and fire cannons in the spring of 1963, and the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in the fall of 1963 have become cultural shorthand for the hatred of southern, blue-collar whites. Throughout the civil rights era, Birmingham’s Connor became the quintessential figure of a southern, working-class bigot. The stratified class structure in the city is the second reason for a case study on Birmingham. The mineral wealth of Jones Valley imprinted both the physical and social landscape across the city. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, working men toiled in mines and mills, becoming a solid southern proletariat. Above the working class, small businessmen, lawyers, and others who earned their living in Birmingham’s service economy comprised the middling class, a group of men who lived with their families on the eastern rise of Red Mountain.

²¹ Reverend Lawton Higgs, interview with Heather Bryson, 11 March 2010.

Finally, presiding atop the social hierarchy, Birmingham's industrialists and land company owners ran the city's mines and mills for their northern investors. Referred to as the Big Mules of the town, these men and their families lived "over the mountain" and above the industrial haze in lush, unincorporated suburbs – Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood.²² Taken together, the ferocity of white resistance and the city's tidy class structure, Birmingham provides a strong case study to untangle the relationships between working-, middle-, and upper-class men and their personal and pecuniary investments in the racial caste system.

Although this project is rooted in the iron veins of Jones Valley and the bedroom suburbs over Red Mountain, the implications of dissolving a singular marriage between white supremacy and class reach beyond Birmingham. The steel city is remarkable for its brutal backlash as well as its orderly class structure, but the elision of southern white manhood and racial supremacy that took place in Birmingham in the middle of the twentieth century is unremarkable. Across the South, white men sequestered black men as well as all women and children in the name of racial purity. The fears that animated white resistance in Birmingham in the post-World War II era – working women, rebellious children, a changing economy, and a determined black freedom struggle – were shared by southern men in general. This is evidenced not only by the exaggerated masculine rhetoric within the 1948 Dixiecrat Party and Massive Resistance in the 1950s, but also by the themes of ancestral sacrifice, anti-northern sentiment, female frailty, and Christian (white) brotherhood which animated the fight for segregation

²² Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871–1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977). Harris, in his study of Birmingham's first fifty years, outlines a similar class structure: the social and economic elite (top 1 percent), the middle class of merchants, real estate interests and contractors (the middle 19 percent) and the manual laborers, farmers, artisan, and shop keepers (the lowest 80 percent).

throughout the region. However, the powerlessness, poverty, and insecurity wrought by Birmingham's colonial economy of steel, I argue, amplified the desire in men to demonstrate supremacy in relationships of both race and gender.

This study is organized both thematically and chronologically. Part I of this study considers how and why ideas and ideals of manhood propelled white resistance across class from the Great Depression to the late 1950s. The first chapter details the racial politics in the city and over the mountain from 1937 – 1950. In the 1940s and early 1950s, biracial unions brought men and women of both races together to fight against the industrial elite. Birmingham's Big Mules responded to unionization with violence, restricted suffrage, and a public campaign to sanctify segregation through Christian manhood.²³ To secure their political power and the investments of their employers, Birmingham's elite shrunk the voting population, elected anti-labor, anti-black politicians to local and state government, and became the driving force behind the Dixiecrat Party by 1948. An exploration into the almost two decades before *Brown* reveals that rich, white men fought to maintain Birmingham's racial hierarchy. These earlier years are important to the story because class unity often overcame the politics of race in Birmingham in the 1930s and 1940s. The cultural signifiers of white supremacy in Alabama – conservative Christianity, adherence to traditional gender roles, and racial solidarity – remained powerful but far from hegemonic in this period. Interracial labor unions, class antagonism, and the intimate working and living environments of the city's laborers kept race from becoming the only meaningful division in Birmingham.

²³ Robert P. Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham during the 1930s," *Journal of Southern History* 47, No. 4 (November 1981): 521-544; Robert J. Norrell, "Labor at the Ballot Box: Unions in Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement," *Journal of Southern History* 57, No. 2 (May 1991): 201-234; Glenn Feldman. *The Disfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2004).

The second chapter documents the massive mobilization of whites across the socioeconomic spectrum in Birmingham following the *Brown* decision. Tapping into exaggerated discourses of black depravity and white purity, Birmingham's white men were able to circumscribe the lives of blacks, white women, and those of their increasingly rebellious young. Birmingham's backlash, I argue, was an attempt to maintain a hierarchy of both race and gender. Whereas southern history has carefully examined the construction of white women as both pure and dependent, the construction of the white male in racialized discourses has not been historicized to the same extent. Throughout the second chapter, I argue that the construction of southern manhood became the defining feature of white resistance.

Part II of this study traces how the Movement changed ideas of white manhood in Birmingham between 1961 and 1963, a period of deep crisis across the white community. In 1961, white businessmen began to preen their image for an increasingly interested national audience. By 1963, upper-class men, aided by a public relations campaign, succeeded in constructing themselves and their image anew. Chapter 3 details an important turning point in white resistance between 1961 and 1963 when closed parks and the brutal assault on the Freedom Riders forced many in Birmingham to question the wisdom of total segregation. Chapter 4 documents 1963, the year of Commissioner Bull Connor's dogs, fire hoses, and the murder of four young girls in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to illustrate how white moderate men reacted publicly and privately to the growing assertion of black manhood in Birmingham. The final chapter charts how wealthier white men used issues of morality and Christianity to secure segregation in their neighborhoods, churches, and in the lives of their women

and children. Throughout the 1960s, Birmingham's moderates initiated a succession of moral cleansing campaigns which specifically targeted whites and should be, I argue, understood in the context of racial integration.

Because of the Movement, as well as the resistance to it, Birmingham has a rich and detailed history during the middle of the twentieth century. The two most important works on the civil rights movement in Birmingham, Glenn Eskew's *But for Birmingham* and Diane McWhorter's *Carry Me Home*, explore the black freedom struggle in the city, as well as the roles played by local leader Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, Movement leader Martin Luther King, the Kennedy and Johnson White Houses, and those played by Bull Connor, George Wallace, and in McWhorter's case, her own father. In her review of *Carry Me Home*, historian Nell Irvin Painter regretted McWhorter's narrative: "As her pages pile up, the twice-told tale of the valiant black struggle for human rights displaces the largely unknown story of white supremacy . . . more work is required before Americans will have come to terms with their history."²⁴ Charles Payne echoes Painter's critique in his review of the destructive tendency of civil rights historiography which, he says, portrays racists as "stupid, vulgar, and one-dimensional."²⁵

Kruse, Lassiter, Crespino, Dailey, Walker, and many others have addressed the prodding of both Payne and Painter in an attempt to understand the reasons and implications of southern racism. In joining the growing body of scholarship on the complexity of white supremacy, this study demonstrates the centrality of southern white manhood to the struggle for racial privilege. It is the goal of this project to begin the

²⁴ Nell Irvin Painter, Review of Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 32 (Summer 2001): 132-134.

²⁵ Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 418.

exploration into the intricate ways in which the culture of white male supremacy continued quietly into the second half of the twentieth century, hiding behind the southern symbol of an ignorant racist in a blue collar.

CHAPTER 2

“PEOPLE IN TORMENT CAN’T ACT LIKE PEOPLE IN HEAVEN”

“There are names that should be put in parentheses after the name Birmingham: TCI, Republic Steel, Sloss-Sheffield,” labor organizer Blaine Owen wrote in 1935 in the opening line to an account of his abduction in the steel town.¹ As Owen walked around a mining neighborhood on a warm evening in May 1935, a police car rolled by the white labor organizer and identified him in the purple light of a blown furnace. Moments after the police car left, another car pulled up next to Owen and stopped. Two white men jumped out and forced Owen into the backseat of the waiting car. A driver pulled the car away as the two men began to beat him in the backseat. The men wanted Owen to divulge the location of the *Southern Worker*, a communist paper based out of Birmingham. When he refused to talk, his abductors drove him to the edge of town and whipped him with a double rope until he lost consciousness.²

News of Owen’s abduction traveled quickly through the company neighborhoods of Birmingham. As he recovered in his bed, a miner, who was a former member of the Klan, came to visit Owen with his eight-year-old son. When the miner and his boy came into the bedroom, the man asked Owen to sit up so that all of the cuts and slashes that crisscrossed his body, back, and face would be “before the child eyes.” Then, according to Owen, the father spoke seriously to his son. He told his child to look at the wounds on the organizer’s body. “Look at that, Sonny,” he told his boy. “That’s the company. That’s what you got to learn to hate.”³

¹ Blaine Owen, “Night Ride in Birmingham” *New Republic* LXXXIV (August 28, 1935): 65-67.

² Owen, “Night Ride in Birmingham.”

³ Blaine Owen, “Night Ride in Birmingham.”

Blaine Owen's personal story of violence and class animosity in Birmingham is not unique in the 1930s. By the end of the decade, almost 50,000 of Birmingham's workers were union men, two-thirds of whom were African Americans. Between 1934 and 1935, there were three highly publicized cases of abductions and beatings for white organizers and countless beatings for blacks.⁴ The American Civil Liberties Union judged the city to be one of the eleven centers of repression in the nation.⁵ "Bad Birmingham," as locals called their city, had the fourth highest homicide rate in America in the 1930s, over 50 murders per 100,000 people.⁶ Local resident Reverend Joseph Lewis Rogers, remembered seeing dead bodies in the street or on the railroad "most any day" around the poorer areas of the city.⁷ The high incidence of murder, one man reflected, was on account of the fact "just a helluva lot of people In Birmingham need killing."⁸

In contrast to the "roughneck" sections of town, nicer neighborhoods in Birmingham were peopled by the city's Big Mules, the wealthy industrialists, as well as bankers, lawyers, and teachers in the 1930s. When *Washington Post* reporter Carroll Kilpatrick first came to Birmingham, she believed these middle- and upper-class whites to be "honest intellectuals" and "men of parts." After spending more time in the city,

⁴ Robert P. Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s" *Journal of Southern History* 47, No. 4 (November 1981): 521-544.

⁵ American Civil Liberties Union, *Let Freedom Ring: The Story of Civil Liberty, 1936-37* (New York, 1937): 12. This information was found in Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham."

⁶ "11,000 Slain Yearly in U.S., A Sharp Rise" *New York Times*, 3 March 1935;

⁷ Reverend Joseph Lewis Rogers, interview by Horace Huntley, 2 March 1995, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (hereafter BCRI).

⁸ Carroll Kilpatrick, "Cities of America, XIV - - Birmingham: Southern Yankee Town" *Washington Post*, 27 March 1939.

however, the symphony, the beautiful library, and the men “of parts” became deeply troubling to Kilpatrick as the reporter learned of the prevalence of illiteracy, syphilis, hunger, and violence among those living and dying in desperation. “The fact of their (the wealthy) existence alongside the frightful poverty” struck Kilpatrick as a disturbing example of southern feudalism.⁹ Birmingham was poor, violent, and deeply divided by class in the midst of the Great Depression. Neglect and hatred characterized the feelings between wealthy men in the city and their poorer counterparts. However, less than two decades later, white men from mines, mills, churches, the courthouse, and the country club would join together in a fraternity of southern, white manhood to fight against racial integration. The seeds of this unlikely brotherhood in Birmingham took root in 1937.

This chapter documents how rich men incited and maintained racial animosity for pecuniary gain across Birmingham’s strictly classed society in the 1930s and 1940s. The disparity between the haves and the have-nots in Birmingham was manifest in both the social and geographic landscape. Nestled above the city, wealthy men breathed clean air, fraternized at the country club, and exploited the disorganized laboring class in the industrial valley for their northern investors. When the Great Depression closed Birmingham’s mines and mills, working men began to organize. The city “was like a stirred ant bed” in the 1930s, according to Alabama historian Wayne Flynt, and the “specter of tens of thousands of Birmingham area unionists constituted an apocalyptic vision capable of throwing the Big Mules into full scale panic.”¹⁰ Between 1937 and

⁹ Kilpatrick, “Cities of America.”

¹⁰ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004).

1953, the city's elite and middle class launched a battle to turn white workers away from class solidarity and toward white supremacy, a daunting task in a city of poor coal and iron workers.¹¹ Although southern whites accepted ideas of biological and cultural superiority, racial hierarchy was not enough to keep poor men from working collectively.

White supremacy in the South, however, was not just about race. It was also, on an elemental level, about southern white manhood, and it was the gendered aspect of white supremacy which proved both persuasive and resilient in the steel town. A specific ethos of southern manhood rooted in Christianity and a conservative moral code resonated with the growing number of residents from the Alabama countryside in Birmingham which helped to bolster ideas of supremacy as well as weaken biracial cooperation. By examining the social and political organization of Birmingham's proletariat alongside the power and priorities of the city's upper echelon in the second quarter of the twentieth century, this chapter documents how a small group of rich, white men constructed a new discourse which bifurcated southern, Christian manhood and worker solidarity.

The first section of this chapter explores the culture and politics of Birmingham's workers, from their neighborhoods to their jobs to the rise of industrial unions. The second portion examines the power of the wealthiest in the city, the rise of Theophilus "Bull" Connor, and the growing gulf between the upper and working classes of men in the later thirties, forties, and fifties. Political power reflected economic power across Jefferson County in this era. Rich whites supported a cumulative poll tax, the Boswell Amendment, and anti-union violence in order to squeeze poorer men out of the voting

¹¹ Robert Woodrun, *Everybody Was Black Down There: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007).

booths.¹² Culminating with the rise of the Dixiecrats and the resurgence of the Klan in Alabama, this chapter details how Birmingham's elite employed a discourse of traditional, Christian southern manhood to garner allegiance from farmers and their families who arrived in Jones Valley in the 1940s.

"A Melting Pot of Raw Men and Raw Materials"

Beginning in 1872, men and women from across the country—and the world—began to move to Birmingham. By the 1920s, the ladders of seniority in the city's coal mines reflected waves of migration. Native whites occupied the highest positions; Scots who arrived in Birmingham around the turn of the century were just below natives but above Sicilians, who migrated in large numbers between 1900 and 1920. Greeks, Bulgarians, and Lebanese arrived in successive migrations and the newer arrivals occupied a lower rung at the workplace and in society.¹³ The rules of seniority, however, did not apply to African Americans. While native whites and blacks lived in and mined Birmingham from its founding, whites moved through the industrial ranks while blacks remained at the bottom of the mines.¹⁴

Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel was the largest employer in Jefferson County, controlling most of Birmingham's mines and mills through the Tennessee Coal, Iron,

¹² The relationship between political and economic power is the subject of Harris's work on Birmingham's first fifty years in which he finds a similar pattern wherein the elite hold most of the power but the middle class informed decisions regarding taxes and public services. Carl V. Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham, 1871–1921*.

¹³ *Birmingham: A Collection of Neighborhood Histories: Elyton-West End: Birmingham's First Neighborhood* (Birmingham: Birminghamfind, 1981); *The Other Side – The Story of Birmingham's Black Community* (Birmingham: Birminghamfind, 1981); *The Italians: From Bisacquino to Birmingham* (Birmingham: Birminghamfind, 1981); *The Best People in the World Live in Wylam* (Birmingham: Birminghamfind, 1981); *The New Patrida: The Story of Birmingham's Greeks* (Birmingham: Birminghamfind, 1981); *Birmingham's Lebanese: The Earth Turned to Gold* (Birmingham: Birminghamfind, 1981)

¹⁴ Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," *Journal of American History* 73, No. 3 (December 1986): 669-694.

and Railroad Company (TCI), which U.S. Steel acquired in 1907. In Birmingham and neighboring towns of Ensley, Bessemer, Pratt City, and Fairfield, TCI managed four major operations: mining coal, ore, and limestone; manufacturing pig-iron in blast furnaces; transforming iron into steel in open-hearth furnaces; and casting or rolling steel into various shapes such as sheets, rails, bars, or pipes. Although TCI was “the big boy of the block,” Sloss-Sheffield Iron and Steel Company, U.S. Pipe, American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO), and smaller operations organized Birmingham into distinct mining and mill communities.¹⁵ By the 1940s, over a third of the city’s workforce worked in either a mine or a mill, in what the boosters declared to be “the richest mineral producing section of the globe.”¹⁶

Although TCI employed thousands of workers in Birmingham, city residents resented the power that the estranged U.S. Steel exercised over local affairs. As attorney Charles Morgan Jr. noted, “Pittsburgh owned the place, lock, stock, and mill.”¹⁷ Often likened to a colonial economy, Birmingham’s men worked and lived according to decisions made in northern boardrooms. As one Birmingham native phrased it, “the curse that we inherited was this – U.S. Steel.”¹⁸ More than the company, however,

¹⁵Birmingham: A Collection of Neighborhood Histories: *The Other Side - The Story Of Birmingham's Black Community; The Italians; From Bisacquino to Birmingham; The Best People in the World Live in Wylam; The New Patrida: The Story of Birmingham's Greeks; Elyton: West End, Birmingham's First Neighborhood; Birmingham's Lebanese: The Earth Turned to Gold.*

¹⁶Christopher Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 66.

¹⁷ Charles Morgan, Jr., interview by Betty Hanson, February 1995, BCRI.

¹⁸ James Head, interview by Betty Hanson, 30 June 1995, BCRI.

Birmingham's workers loathed TCI's overseers who lived in their "precious little kingdom" above the haze and directed a city of men with only money in mind.¹⁹

Living conditions varied within each of the mining and mill districts. In the first half of the twentieth century, companies brought men into work and settled their families into company towns. In Sloss Quarters, which employed mainly Italians and African Americans, the Italians lived in the front of the company neighborhood and the African Americans in the back. However, the wholesale separation which characterized Sloss was not the rule. In the company villages of the Ensley Mill, the Docena Mine, the Mulga Mine, and the Fairfield mills, a row of houses for blacks often stood back to back with a row of houses for whites.²⁰ Steelworkers, white and black alike, lived and worked on an eerie landscape, captive to the heat and orange glow of the nearby blast furnaces. One Alabama country boy described the unnatural ambiance of the mill district when he wrote a letter home to his mother to tell her that he lived in "Ensley City, near Hell."²¹

Residential racial patterns varied in Birmingham according to the original patterns established by different companies. For the first half of the twentieth century, the largest single concentration of blacks in one neighborhood was "the Southside." Shotgun houses stood side by side between 10th and 34th streets south. Domestics, foundry workers, and a few teachers occupied the houses. The neighborhood residents bought their food at the company commissaries or corner groceries often run by Italians and Lebanese, and worshipped in small Baptist churches.²² Black and Italian children all

¹⁹ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

²⁰ *The Other Side - The Story Of Birmingham's Black Community*.

²¹ Jim Baggett, *Historic Photos of Birmingham* (Nashville: Turner Publishing Company, 2006), 47.

²² *The Other Side - The Story Of Birmingham's Black Community*.

played together, remembered a Southside resident. Race “didn’t become a thing” until, at an older age, she noticed that she had to order a ten cent Krystal burger from a window when there were seats inside.²³ Outside of the company villages and the Southside neighborhood, the rest of Birmingham’s African Americans lived in small, distinct neighborhoods within large, predominantly white neighborhoods: Tuxedo Junction in Ensley, Collegeville in North Birmingham, Zion City in Woodlawn, and Kingston in East Birmingham.²⁴ Mrs. Jessie Shepherd recalled only black homes in neighborhood of Collegeville, “we lived close to U.S. Pipe, the plants with all the smoke and the soot so they [white people] lived a little further away from all of that.”²⁵

Neighborhoods organized around companies functioned as small islands. Even as company communities rubbed up against one another, men identified very strongly and took pride in their job and their company. As ACIPCO founder John Joseph Eagan often remarked, “Our real job is making better men.”²⁶ More than anything else, sports teams fostered a sense of community among families living under the shadow of their mill; each had a baseball, softball, bowling, basketball, and volleyball team. Baseball was the most celebrated company sport across Birmingham, but within the working communities, it was boxing. Boxing matches took place on the weekends and even over lunch breaks at the mills. The fighters would represent their job and fans rooted and

²³ Eloise Staples, interview with Horace Huntley, 5 March 1995, BCRI.

²⁴ “*The Other Side - The Story of Birmingham's Black Community*.”

²⁵ Jessie Shepherd, interview with Horace Huntley, 16 March 1995, BCRI.

²⁶ “People and Pipe: Fifty years of Pipe Progress at ACIPCO,” 1955, BPLAD.

placed bets for men who shared their line of work.²⁷ A similar feeling of camaraderie characterized mining communities.²⁸

A resilient working-class culture developed along Birmingham's coal seams over the first half of the twentieth century marked by tough men, suspicious of their sedentary overseers.²⁹ The smelter economy, stamped onto Alabama's rural cultures made a "melting pot of raw men as well as raw materials," observed one northern visitor.³⁰ When Birmingham's round-the-clock production halted during the Great Depression, men walked out of closed mines and mills and the city stood as "a paralyzed giant."³¹ Jobless men roamed the streets and filled the parks "in greater numbers than in any other city in the nation."³² TCI slashed worker's wages between fifty to seventy percent in those mines and mills that "limped along" to supply the waning demand for steel.³³ The shared work and residential spaces made it easy for unions to gain a foothold. Commenting on the interracial relationships forged at the workplace, a black fireman at Sloss joked, "there was a devil in that furnace and you had to work together."³⁴

²⁷ "Bull Ladle: Stockham Valves and Fittings," 7 January 1949, BPLAD. .

²⁸ Robert Woodrun, *Everybody was Black Down There: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields*.

²⁹ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

³⁰ "Birmingham: Integration's Hottest Crucible," *Time Magazine*, 15 December 1958.

³¹ Robert Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s."

³² George R. Leighton, "Birmingham, Alabama: The City of Perpetual Promise," *Harper's Magazine*, CLXXV, August 1937, 239, quoted in Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s," 522.

³³ Christopher Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*.

³⁴ David Allen and Sloss Fireman, Interview, 27 March 1984, University of Alabama Oral History Project, Digital Collections.

“A Movement of Poor People”

Although racial and ethnic anxieties informed the habits of Birmingham's proletariat, the terrifying conditions in the 1930s prompted men to align along lines of class rather than those of race or ethnicity; “we had nothing to lose,” explained one white miner.³⁵ Working men had more in common with one another than with the white men who profited off of their hard labor. As one black miner commented about the race issue in Birmingham's mines, “everybody was black down there.”³⁶ To the working families in Jones Valley, “Mountain Brook seemed like two thousand miles away.” Camaraderie based on skin color between wealthy white men and poor whites in the 1930s and early 1940s was nowhere to be found.³⁷ As Robert Johnson, an L and N railroad worker wryly remarked on notions of white supremacy, “people in torment can't act like people in heaven.”³⁸

From its infancy, Birmingham's workers organized through Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) unions. Founded in 1935 by John Lewis, Sidney Hillman, and David Dubinsky, the CIO was a biracial, inclusive, industrial labor union which stood in contrast to the exclusive and craft-oriented American Federation of Labor. While there was a precedent for interracial cooperation in Birmingham through the United Mine Workers of America around the turn of the century, there was little momentum for labor in Alabama until the Great Depression when Birmingham became the “worst hit town in

³⁵ Woodrun, *Everybody was Black Down There*, 50.

³⁶ Woodrun, *Everybody was Black Down There*, 50.

³⁷ Staples, interview, BCRI.

³⁸ Robert Johnson Interview, 19 August 1939, Carnegie-Myrdal Study 1940, Microfilm 6772-005, BCRI.

the country,” according to President Roosevelt’s administration.³⁹ The organizing drives of the 1930s reinvigorated labor’s goal of a southern united work force. In 1933, the UMWA sent black and white organizers to the Alabama coal fields and enlisted almost all miners under the National Recovery Act, sixty percent of whom were African American.⁴⁰ The UMWA fought for higher wages, better working conditions, and fairer treatment in the mines, “regardless of race.”⁴¹

The United Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers organized five thousand ore miners between 1934 and 1938. In 1936; interracial unionism was strengthened with the founding of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) under the guidance of William Mitch, Birmingham’s District 20 UMWA director.⁴² Mitch, an Ohio native and the former director of the UMWA in Indiana, increased union membership of both black and white steelworkers.⁴³ In 1937, U.S. Steel officially recognized and contracted with SWOC, affecting TCI’s twelve thousand workers who were courted by the union to join and pay dues during the most difficult of economic times.⁴⁴ Philip Murray became president of the CIO and the leader of the new United Steel Workers of America (USWA) in 1942. The USWA represented workers in ore mines and in steel, tin, and

³⁹ Norrell, “Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama,” 671.

⁴⁰ Woodrun, *Everybody was Black Down There*, 220.

⁴¹ Woodrun, *Everybody was Black Down There*, 220.

⁴² Norrell, “Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama,” 671.

⁴³ Norrell, “Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama,” 672.

⁴⁴ Norrell, “Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama,” 675.

aluminum mills. By the beginning of WWII, 50,000 workers pledged union membership in Jefferson County.⁴⁵

The creation of sturdy biracial steel, coal, and ore unions in Birmingham in the 1930s became a unique achievement in the labor history of the South. Union men organized the white community while black ministers played a key role in organizing the black community.⁴⁶ Men who joined the UMWA pledged “not to discriminate against a brother on account of race, creed, or color.” A.C. Buttram, a white member of UMWA, claimed that the union “inherited the race question” but understood itself instead to an organized “movement of poor people.”⁴⁷ According to labor historian Judith Stein, the first goal of the CIO unions in Birmingham was to bring wages up to the northern pay scale. The southern wage differential in the steel industry ended in 1954 but beginning in 1937, Mitch and the UMWA began winning wage increases from TCI through the Brotherhood of Captive Mine Workers, a group of union and company men.⁴⁸ The SWOC also established a job classification program effectively ending the widespread practice of paying black men below their classification. Every mill job had a numerical classification, ranging from JC-1 to JC-30 which corresponded with an hourly rate. This ensured that compensation was clearly measured by job grade rather than by race, to place the emphasis “on dollars rather than human souls.”⁴⁹ The classification system

⁴⁵ Ingalls, Robert, “The Flogging of Joseph Gelders: A Policeman’s View,” *Labor History*, Volume 20, Issue 4, (1979): 532.

⁴⁶ A.C. Buttram, interview, Collection 976, Box 1, File 1, BPLAD.

⁴⁷ Buttram, interview, BPLAD.

⁴⁸ “Agreement: TCI Wage-rate Increase,” 7 May 1937, UMA Papers, Collection 1754, Box 1, File 8, BPLAD.

⁴⁹ “UMWA statement,” 23 May 1937, UMWA Papers, Collection 1754, Box 1, File 38, BPLAD.

benefitted both blacks and whites. While it ensured that the companies pay African-American workers fairly, it simultaneously allayed the fears of whites aware that their job could be performed at a cheaper rate by a black worker.⁵⁰

CIO unions provided space in Birmingham where blacks had rights to equal treatment, but all of the men lived and worked in a world of white supremacy.⁵¹

Southern hiring was, first and foremost, racialized. African-American men held unskilled and, more infrequently, semi-skilled jobs in Birmingham's mills. Companies hired black men for jobs that had a shorter line of progression – a job which would never, because of seniority, become a white collar position. Upward mobility, therefore, was capped at the stage of hiring. This practice perpetuated Birmingham's race wage even after the CIO won the job classification program for its workers; "caste in steel" as historian Robert Norrell aptly named this effect of the Jim Crow South.

The dire economic condition of the region prompted the federal government and local labor leaders to join together to find answers. During Thanksgiving weekend in 1938, fifteen hundred people gathered in Birmingham's Municipal Auditorium to testify to the sluggish character of the southern economy. Together, the congregants sought solutions to the region's grinding and persistent poverty. Sharecroppers and miners from the Alabama countryside filed in alongside congressmen and businessmen from Washington. The conference centered on the *Report on the Economic Conditions of the South*, a congressional study which concluded that the southern economy was not only lagging but slipping backwards. The Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW)

⁵⁰ Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," 676.

⁵¹ Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama," 677.

was the brainchild of Joseph Gelders, a Birmingham native and labor advocate who was brutally attacked in 1936 for his work with unions in the city. Beginning in 1937, Gelders began to manage a small cadre of Alabama liberals who worked to organize a forum to discuss the impoverished South. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt endorsed and attended the meeting along with southerners from every class and color. Farmers, politicians, labor organizers, business executives, professors, college students, and newspapermen - black, white, men, and women gathered together to push the South forward. Eleanor Roosevelt, Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black and the President of University of North Carolina, Frank Graham, led the large "revival."⁵² In the early afternoon of the second day of the conference, newly elected Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety Bull Connor arrived at the auditorium to enforce the segregation laws of the city. With officers in tow, Connor separated blacks from whites along a center aisle, telling those gathered; "Negroes and whites will not segregate together." Roosevelt, who had arrived late for the afternoon session, was seated on the side reserved for African Americans. In a politically symbolic act, the First Lady refused to move to the white side and instead placed her chair in the middle of the aisle. While those in attendance lavished attention on Roosevelt's elegant defiance, anti-labor residents of Birmingham took particular issue with Mrs. Roosevelt's presence. The wife of leading industrialist Charles DeBardeleben bemoaned the conference and the First Lady who "told all of the Negroes to get out of the kitchen," and forever altered the race relations in the city. "She made a mess of Birmingham if you want to know what I think," her daughter confessed. Local laborers lamented Connor's insistence on absolute

⁵² The details of the conference come from chapter three in Patricia Sullivan's, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

control of race relations. Percy Moore, an African-American construction worker reflected, “That is the way these crackers are – they try to run your business.”⁵³ Attorney Charles Morgan agreed. Birmingham’s residents were “liberal on the labor issue,” he reported, “until you saw the people at the country clubs and running the town, I mean owning it.”⁵⁴ Connor segregated the conference at the behest of those men to whom Morgan referred.

“We Never Really Knew that there was a Depression”

Beginning in 1937, Theophilus Eugene Connor, Birmingham’s most infamous politician, worked at the pleasure of the city’s wealthiest and most powerful men. Born in Selma in 1897 to a farm girl and a railroad dispatcher, Connor’s parents christened him Eugene after a family member and Theopolus after a notorious bank robber. His mother died when he was eight. For the remainder of his childhood, Connor moved from relative to relative which deprived him of a formal education, a glaring deficiency that infuriated his detractors and made his wealthy supporters uneasy. In 1924, Connor became a baseball announcer in Birmingham and where he earned his nickname, “Bull,” because he screamed the play-by-play over the radio in his deep, raspy voice to overwhelm the noise of the ticker tape machine. Bull Connor loved the nickname, even going so far as to list himself as Bull in the phonebook.⁵⁵ Connor’s voice “became the talk of the town” and, in 1934, Connor ran for state legislature at the prodding of his

⁵³ Percy Moore, interview with Joseph Taylor, 19 August 1938, Carnegie-Myrdal Study 1940, Microfilm 6772-005, BCRI.

⁵⁴ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

⁵⁵ Claude Sitton, “Peace Hopes Rise,” 23 May 1963, *New York Times*.

radio fans.⁵⁶ He won by a large margin on account of his “own special back-slapping, church-going, good-natured, cornball manner.”⁵⁷ When asked about his victory, Connor was puzzled. “Why should the people of Jefferson County have elected me to the state legislature? It was like taking a brick layer and sending him out on the stage toe-dancing.”⁵⁸

Three years later, with the support of his closest aide and TCI lawyer, Jim Simpson, Connor ran for the number two spot in Birmingham’s city government, Commissioner of Public Safety, because his opponent for the position had fallen out of favor. The Commissioner of Public Safety controlled the police department, fire department, and the Board of Education. Connor’s campaign in 1937 seemed to be everything that the citizens of Birmingham wanted: he ran as an independent candidate who was not indebted to the wealthy, “I owe no political debt. I’ve made no private promises,” he told the voters. In addition to his pledge to serve the common man in Birmingham, Connor ran on a platform of racial purity, family values, and an oath to expel labor radicals from the town. The latter point courted the attention of the Big Mules who gave quietly but handsomely to his campaign. Bull kept taxes low, controlled strikes, and went after radicals. In turn, the city’s elite kept the brash Commissioner in power.⁵⁹ “Connor could guarantee elections because of T.C.I.” noted Birmingham politician James Head and the middle class supported the goals of Birmingham’s Mules

⁵⁶ Michael Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them”: Birmingham, Alabama Faces the Civil Rights Movement, 1963” Senior Honors Thesis, Brown University, 1974: 64.

⁵⁷ Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them.” 64.

⁵⁸ Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” 65.

⁵⁹ Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” 67.

“out of fear that U.S. Steel may take its plants elsewhere.”⁶⁰ Luther Patrick, another Birmingham politician commented on the relationship, the “unholy coalition between big industrialists, the Klan and the white supremacy boys is the most vicious alliance possible. . . they keep the campfires burning because it pays and they keep on owning and controlling the South.”⁶¹

During the late 1930s and 1940s, Bull Connor honored his campaign promise to run the unions out of Birmingham. With Connor as a willing pawn, the industrialists moved to break the unions through establishment violence. Using the municipal police force, Connor organized a “Red Squad” to combat the increasing unionization in the mines and mills. White supremacist groups, the Klan, the White Legion, the American Legion, the Silver Shirts, and the Alabama Black Shirts joined Connor’s squad, along with the head of TCI’s security detail to scare labor organizers.⁶² Connor’s paramilitary used death threats, dynamite, and physical abuse to “secure” Birmingham’s mills and mines. According the ACLU, repression was “continuous, not incidental.”⁶³ Biracial unions, the SWOC and UMWA, continued to recruit and maintain white and black membership in Birmingham throughout the 1930s and into the war era. Men in unions and mines, reported attorney Charles Morgan Jr. never worshipped “at the altar of mammon.”⁶⁴ A strong class identity informed the politics of the workplace and the wider machinations of society.

⁶⁰ Head, interview, BCRI.

⁶¹ Patrick, interview, BCRI.

⁶² Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” 56.

⁶³ Ingalls, “Antiradical Violence in Birmingham in the 1930s,” 535.

⁶⁴ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

While miners and mill workers lived on the western side of Birmingham in Jones Valley, the middle class and elite lived in elevated neighborhoods along Highland Avenue and over Red Mountain. The smoke from the steel mills obscured the view from the eastern and more elevated edge of Birmingham, a barrier that protected rich whites from the poverty below. Ruth Bruner, the daughter of an executive at the DeBardeleben Corporation, commented on the impact of the Great Depression on Birmingham's Big Mules. "We had plenty to eat, a beautiful home, two boys were in private school," in fact, she noted, "we never really knew that there was a Depression."⁶⁵ Following World War II, the estrangement between the working class and the well-to-do grew as increasing numbers of white collared men and their families moved to the unincorporated suburbs of Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood. Just as Birmingham's workers regarded the distance between the poor and the wealthy as a stretch of thousands of miles, those along and over Red Mountain considered the city to be a land apart. The valley was "a foreign country," Virginia Durr wrote in her autobiography, "and the people who lived there might well as not have existed."⁶⁶

The very wealthiest men in Jefferson County lived in Mountain Brook, the only place in Jefferson County that "anybody in their right mind wanted to live," according to Charles Morgan.⁶⁷ Founded in 1929 by Robert Jemison and incorporated in 1942, Mountain Brook rests on the rise of Red Mountain. Designed by Boston landscape architect Warren Manning, the small town resembled northern cities of extreme

⁶⁵ Ruth T. Bruner and Hattie H. Adolphus, interview with Dawn Thomas, 21 May 1976, University of Alabama Oral History Project, Digital Collections.

⁶⁶ Virginia Foster Durr, *Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr*, ed. Hollinger F. Barnard (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 25.

⁶⁷ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

affluence in the 1930s and 1940s. Estate-sized lots dotted winding roads which were each organized around one of three village centers. Nature preserves insulated Mountain Brook and the town was lush with Dogwood trees and babbling brooks. An old-fashioned mill perched along one of the waterways completed the appearance of an older, northern town.

By the middle of the twentieth century, industrialists, bankers, lawyers, insurance brokers, businessmen and their families populated Mountain Brook, making it Alabama's richest city, a disquieting contrast to the poor city below. Chosen Mountain Brook residents joined the Mountain Brook Country Club which described itself as "a small and congenial coterie of cultured people with kindred tastes" who congregated in an English Tudor style mansion with pool and golf course.⁶⁸ New money built the bedroom suburbs and country club of Mountain Brook and it, just like the valley below, was rooted squarely in the New South. However, the men "over-the-mountain" regarded themselves not as overseers but as southern patricians who ruled and cared for the city below. Pointing out the inaccuracy of this self-concept, Birmingham historian Michael Nichols noted that the only evidence of a patrician class was the country clubs and white supremacist outlook of the wealthy, concern beyond the bottom line was never evident. The image of the Big Mules as patricians was, Nicholl's wrote, "a veneer pasted over a crass, commercial mindset."⁶⁹ "The Negro's worst enemy," seconded

⁶⁸ Marilyn Davis Barefield, *A History of Mountain Brook, Alabama and Incidentally of Shades Valley* (Birmingham: Southern University Press, 1989) p. 155. Quoted from an undated Mountain Brook Country Club Brochure.

⁶⁹ Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 184.

Birmingham native Jim Williamson, was the “brutal and hateful overseer class,” a group of men with a “fully matured class mentality.”⁷⁰

“A Bid for Potential Tyranny”

The wealthy and powerful in Birmingham possessed a concrete advantage over poor and working men – the franchise. In 1901, Alabama’s legislature passed a cumulative poll tax requirement which forced an individual to pay all of his unpaid poll taxes since the age of 21. The cumulative poll tax pushed poor men, black and white, out of the electorate, as well as those who became interested in the franchise later in life – a common characteristic of men who migrated from the countryside to Birmingham.⁷¹ If working men were able to pay poll taxes during the 1930s and 1940s, they still faced a corrupt electoral system; voting was not clean in Birmingham. According to city council woman Nina Miglianico, “when you voted, they put a number on your ballot so that they could trace how you voted” and the threat of retribution followed men and women into the voting booth.⁷² By the mid-1940s, the ostensibly public ballot combined with the constant animosity toward labor prompted union leaders to fight for a secret ballot so that the rank and file could vote without fear.⁷³

In 1945, Alabama’s state government added the Boswell Amendment to the constitution. Reacting to both the Supreme Court’s decision to outlaw the traditional all-white primary in 1944 and the mounting demands for equal rights from southern blacks

⁷⁰ Jim Williamson, interview 19 July 1947, Rasmussen Collection at BCRI; last quote comes from Robert Norrell’s “Labor at the Ballot Box: Unions in Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement,” *Journal of Southern History* (May 1991): 234.

⁷¹ Glenn Feldman. *The Disfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2004).

⁷² Nina Miglianico, interview with Ed Lamonte, 23 September 2003, BCRI.

⁷³ Miglianico, interview, BCRI.

after WWII, Alabama's elite looked for alternate means to mute the political expression of blacks and poor whites. Introduced in the state senate by E.C. "Bud" Boswell in 1945 but originally conceived by the conservative Chairman of the Democratic Committee Gessner McCorvey of Mobile, the Boswell Amendment provided the Big Mules with a tool to control voter eligibility. Effectually, the amendment gave registrars the authority to check an applicant's ability to "understand" the United States Constitution, an obviously subjective tool intended to manipulate the color and class of the ballot box. State legislators approved of the amendment almost unanimously and it was placed on the ballot in a special election in November 1946. In an open letter to "The Voters of Alabama," McCorvey warned Alabamians not to allow "vast hordes of ignorant and illiterate people" the franchise and reminded the state's whites that the official insignia of the state party was a white, crowing rooster with the words "WHITE SUPREMACY."

The fight over the Boswell Amendment, V.O. Key commented, exposed the "progressive-conservative cleavage" which characterized Alabama's political landscape. Newly-elected governor Jim Folsom and Alabama's two U.S. senators, John Sparkman and Lister Hill represented the liberal side of the debate and opposed the amendment which Hill warned would prevent suffrage not just for blacks in Alabama but for anyone whom "the Big Mules do not approve," an accurate prediction.⁷⁴ By 1948, white men in overalls reported strict scrutiny and dismissal from Jefferson County registrars on Election Day.⁷⁵ Folsom, Hill, and Sparkman found support from most of Alabama's

⁷⁴ William D. Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1984), 66.

⁷⁵ *Birmingham News*, 20 November 1947 and 28 January 1948.

major newspapers, organized labor, African Americans, and religious minorities.⁷⁶ Still others recognized the danger in a subjective requirement for the franchise even though they were not politically aligned with the liberal wing of the party. A letter to the *Birmingham News* from a merchant who opposed both the CIO and Eleanor Roosevelt cautioned Alabama's whites against the Boswell Amendment which was, he insisted, "a one gift horse which it behooves us to look straight in the mouth – its teeth are as false as a dime-store diamond." In short, the writer insisted, the amendment was "a bid for potential tyranny."⁷⁷

The Boswell Amendment became crucial in maintaining the political power of the conservative Black Belt. Along with the cumulative poll tax, the 1901 Constitution granted the balance of Alabama's political power to the bourbon elites in the Black Belt who, by the 1940s, had fallen under the control of the state's big industrialists. "The Black Belt might be the tail that wags the dog," noted one Alabama journalist, "but it is the Big Mules who are the masters of that highly versatile tail."⁷⁸ The recent inauguration of Governor Folsom threatened to strip the state's elite of their disproportionate political power. In his campaign, Folsom promised to reapportion Alabama's electoral map, effectively ending the rule of Alabama's ruling class, "Folsom can take the Southern Bourbons by the scruff of the neck and shove them aside like spindly-legged newboys," one political columnist optimistically joked.⁷⁹ Birmingham's elite would not be so easily pushed aside. Past governor, Big Mule lawyer, and

⁷⁶ William D. Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 66.

⁷⁷ *Birmingham News*, 22 September 1946.

⁷⁸ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 49.

⁷⁹ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 54.

Birmingham resident Frank Dixon and infamous Birmingham demagogue Horace Wilkinson joined the city's leading industrialists in their fight for the passage of the amendment. Local conservatives who advocated restrictive suffrage guidelines did so under the mantle of white supremacy. According to Dixon, most of Alabama's blacks were not qualified to vote and the "registration of 200,000 unqualified electors in the hands of unscrupulous men" harkened back to the days of Reconstruction, when "Alabama went through its Gethsemane" and the "lives of decent men, women, and children were always in danger."⁸⁰ Decency and white skin blended rhetorically in the discourse of white supremacists in the 1940s, a fusion which jettisoned blacks from belonging and encouraged the disciplining of "indecent" whites.

In Birmingham, the electorate's eagerness to vote on matters of decency and morality over those of economic importance increased in the post-war years due to the large influx of farmers and their families between 1944 and 1950, and the social disorder wrought by the mass migration. This trend is apparent not only in the resurgence of a new Klan in Alabama that flogged misbehaving whites, but also in the campaign for the Boswell Amendment, which passed in Alabama in 1946 by a slim margin, 89,263 to 76,843. In Birmingham, the amendment passed with considerable majorities. In the working-class precincts of Fairfield, ACIPCO, and Dolomite, where the amendment promised to limit the political will of labor, the amendment received majorities of 55, 57, and 58 percent, respectively. These majorities increased in the ballots boxes stationed on the slope and over Red Mountain in the upper-class neighborhoods of Highland Park, Mountain Brook, and Homewood which voted for the

⁸⁰ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 63.

Boswell Amendment with 54, 64, and 65 percent support.⁸¹ Although joined by some of the working class whites in Birmingham, the wealthy led the fight against African Americans gaining the franchise. The disfranchisement of the poor and working class in Birmingham guaranteed that the city's elite would control the economic and political agenda in the 1930s and 1940s.⁸² Reflecting on this era, City Councilwoman Nina Miglianico underlined the concentrated power of the wealthy in Birmingham, "What Birmingham needed was twelve good funerals and the city could start over again."⁸³

Fighting Labor in the 1940s

In 1946, the largest wave of strikes in U.S. history occurred across the three big metal industries, the USWA, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (UE). Although companies responded by increasing wages, the limited effect of the massive strike prompted CIO leaders to reach beyond America's manufacturing belt to increase the political clout of the nation's unions. Noting that union representation across the country would strengthen labor's political arm, the CIO launched Operation Dixie in 1946 to increase organization in the South. Operation Dixie began just as southern elites tried to take advantage of the end of the wartime regulations to fight unionization in order to court and keep northern industrial interests. In 1946, the strongest union in the South was in Birmingham's TCI because USWA has organized U.S. Steel's workers.⁸⁴ Between 1946 and 1949, the

⁸¹ Glenn T. Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁸² Glenn Feldman, *The Disenfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

⁸³ Miglianico, interview, BCRI.

⁸⁴ As a whole, the southern rate of unionization was only half of the national average. Wage increases came to the South, if grudgingly, but had an ironic and unfortunate effect across southern industry. By

city's Big Mules initiated a violent and massive campaign to break the back of labor in Birmingham. Race, "southern labor's Achilles heel," was not enough to hobble southern unionism in the 1940s. Mountain Brook's men would have to do more.

Attorney Charles Morgan noted that the city's segregationist politicians "represented the rich, the well-borne, and the able."⁸⁵ In the 1930s and 1940s in Birmingham, racial liberalism was most often found among the working class rather than the wealthy, according to city residents. In 1947, female lawyer and Birmingham newcomer Eleen Wynn remarked, "Until I came to Birmingham, I believed, without a doubt, that only poor whites oppress the Negro." It was the poor white who was "the source of all of the hostility . . . so it was quite a shock to me when I came to Birmingham and found that the actual facts were quite different."⁸⁶ Union leader Amzi Barber noted, Birmingham's "race relations" could be linked directly "to the business interests," and not just the Big Mules.⁸⁷ Alabama historian Glenn Feldman asserts that this association was widely accepted, "Many in Alabama realized that the new Klan was closely connected with the Dixiecrats, Big Mule, and industrial consensus."⁸⁸ In Birmingham, the white, middle class failed to challenge the men over the mountain even

1949, mechanization of mines and mills in certain functions became more lucrative than paid workers. Improved wages incentivized companies to mechanize at the same time that the demand for steel was slowly waning. Between 1937 and 1960, steel companies laid off 10 percent of unskilled and semiskilled their workers even as steel production actually doubled in those years. Automation eliminated much of the backbreaking work both under and above ground. Continuous miners and continuous loaders sent blue-collar workers home, "for the first time in American history, the demand for unskilled labor fell." Judith Stein "Southern Workers in National Unions: Birmingham Steelworkers, 1933-1951," *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, ed. Robert Zieger, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 183-222.

⁸⁵ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

⁸⁶ Eleen Wynn, interview, 19 July 1947, Rasmussen Collection at BCRI, File 2.

⁸⁷ Amzi Barber, interview, 4 August 1948, Rasmussen Collection at BCRI, File 1.

⁸⁸ Glenn Feldman, "Soft Opposition: Elite Acquiescence and Klan-Sponsored Terrorism in Alabama."

as their numbers increased in the post-war era.⁸⁹ Joining their wealthier counterparts over Red Mountain, white-collared businessmen left the city for the safety and status that came with suburban living. While not a part of the overseer class, Birmingham's middling men benefitted from the big businesses in town and supported the goal of an unorganized laboring class. The business progressivism which animated the middle class left matters of race to Bull and his benefactors, ruffling "the feathers of the region's conservatives hardly at all."⁹⁰

Birmingham's industrialists such as Charles DeBardeleben and Richard Stockham went beyond ensuring limited suffrage and throwing their support behind Connor. Through organized violence, all-white company unions, and a powerful discourse of white supremacy, the wealthy in Birmingham directly influenced working-class politics in the city below. When President Roosevelt signed the National Industrial Recovery Act in 1933, an executive at the DeBardeleben's coal mining corporation in Birmingham opined, "The Stroke of that Pen will be the ruination of this country."⁹¹ Many industrialists in Birmingham, however, were not as fatalistic. Charles DeBardeleben, son of Birmingham patriarch Henry DeBardeleben, mounted machine guns along his property and promised to shoot any labor organizers who stepped onto his coal mines. "Uncle Charlie" as he preferred his coal miners to call him, despised labor unions "as much as loved Auburn football."⁹² In 1942, DeBardeleben established "Alabama: The News Magazine of the Deep South," a pro-segregation, anti-union magazine that

⁸⁹ Head, interview, BCRI.

⁹⁰ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 63.

⁹¹ Bruner and Adolphus, interview, UAB Oral History Project, Digital Collections.

⁹² Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 184.

became the “unofficial voice of the Big Mules,” a publication which insisted that “the Southern Negro” advanced in Birmingham “only after years of development watched over and nurtured by his most understanding friend, the Southern white man.”⁹³

“DeBardleben’s “Alabama” advocated the dissolution of the Committee of Fair Employment Practice in 1942, the passage of the Boswell Amendment in 1946 and the Dixiecrat Revolt in 1948, a political campaign which would forever split the two factions of the Alabama Democratic Party.”⁹⁴ With Operation Dixie in 1946, Birmingham’s industrialists began to combat biracial organization through all-white company unions which promised to give members better job assignments and higher wages. In the mines of Docena and Wylam, company unions lured white men away from the UMWA. TCI, the reluctant CIO bastion in Birmingham, had by the close of the 1940s signed up “practically all” white men in the company union by promising “special consideration” to each member including better job assignments and higher wages.⁹⁵

While violence targeted labor organizers, company unions crippled biracial organization, and voting restrictions stifled the political expression of the black and poor, the in-migration of rural Alabamians into Birmingham changed the social and political landscape of the steel town. From the beginning of World War II to the close of the 1950s, companies sought workers fresh from the Alabama’s countryside. Commenting on the search for rural workers in the late 1940s, Birmingham citizen Ed McGraw insisted, “All of the hiring that is done by these mines and pipe shops around here is

⁹³ *Alabama: News Magazine of the Deep South*, Volume 7, Number 25, 19 June 1942, 3.

⁹⁴ Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” 180.

⁹⁵ Judith Stein “Southern Workers in National Unions: Birmingham Steelworkers, 1933-1951,” *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, ed. Robert Zieger, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 183-222.

done of rural labor, straight from the farm who have no union ideas and think that they are making big money.⁹⁶ Birmingham's rural newcomers changed their urban destinations, as historian Pete Daniel has argued. Socially conservative, religiously rooted in the fundamentals of the Bible Belt, and disoriented by the unsettled state of patriarchy, Birmingham's newer residents gained a powerful voice in the political discourse in the city.

To rationalize limited suffrage, increased appeals to white supremacy, and the violence which supported these aims, men like Wilkinson, Connor, Dixon, and their Big Mule backers advocated a community which ran counter to the class allegiances of the CIO, and those which Folsom, Sparkman, and Hill encouraged. By the middle of the 1940s, vocal conservatives in Birmingham campaigned for fraternity based on skin color rather than class. Those who had opposed the New Deal before the war took advantage of the disorder during and following the war to maintain a manageable electorate, weaken labor, and secure their power in Alabama; white supremacy buttressed each of their goals. An overriding concern with southern manhood was evident from the outset of the gradual turn away from New Deal liberalism in Alabama toward social conservatism and the "mystical bonds of white fellowship."⁹⁷

Personally and publicly, southern white men contemplated their stake in the racial order. "As a southern man with the normal human dislike of foreigners both in space and blood," Alabama's former governor Frank Dixon was having difficulty reconciling his upbringing with contemporary notions of racial equality, he confided to a friend. "The

⁹⁶ Ed McGraw, interview, Rasmussen Collection at BCRI, File 22.

⁹⁷ McGraw, interview, Rasmussen Collection.

Huns have wrecked the theories of the master race with which we were so contented,” but as a “man who is close to the land, who follows blood lines,” Dixon could not relinquish his belief in white supremacy, “I prefer to keep my faith.”⁹⁸ He was not alone; many of the region’s whites understood racial supremacy to be essential to southern, white manhood. The cultural reverence to manhood became politically potent in the post-war years as many men raised on the land suffered a great loss of independence to the industrial order.⁹⁹

Christianity and the Company

Throughout the 1940s, the conservative faction of the Democratic Party in Alabama, led by the Birmingham elite, fought the state’s liberals for the soul of the party. While class interests animated the party of Roosevelt, the traditional, southern Bourbons employed the gendered rhetoric of white, male supremacy, idealized notions of home rule, and appeals to southern tradition to divide the workers of Alabama. By 1948, Birmingham’s conservatives had crafted a political and social discourse that successfully exploited the dissonance between southern, white manhood and racial equality. With mounting fervor, Frank Dixon, Horace Wilkinson, Bull Connor, and other men who acted as “pawns for a goodly number” of Big Mules, propped up Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and racial equality as direct threats against southern,

⁹⁸ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 99.

⁹⁹ A compelling argument for the reassuring aspects of martial or traditional manhood in a generation of urban newcomers is made in Thembisa Waetjen’s, *Workers and Warriors*, a study on Inkatha nationalism in South Africa. Thembisa Waetjen, *Workers and Warriors: Masculinity and the Struggle for Nation in South Africa*, (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

Christian manhood.¹⁰⁰ This message resonated with the white men in Birmingham who had only recently left the fields and farms of the Alabama countryside.

As small towns along the Alabama countryside emptied into Birmingham, farmers encountered the leveling conditions of mine and mill work in the city. Between 1946 and 1949, over 15,000 new family dwellings were built in the city to accommodate the influx of residents, a number which did not meet the demand, according to Mayor Jimmie Morgan. Many families moving into Birmingham had to double up because of the housing shortage.¹⁰¹ The great in-migration affected the southern city in important ways. Historian Pete Daniel, examining the exodus from the southern countryside, argues that the demographic shift transformed the cultures of class in cities as stock car racing and the blues stood to demarcate the well-borne from “the vulgus.”¹⁰² Alongside the budding worlds of wrestling, cars, and country music which Daniel studies, an important shift took place within the working lives of men in Birmingham. Men who abandoned the fields to work in Birmingham’s mines and mills endured a loss of independence over their daily lives and confronted an urban world in which patriarchy and conservative values could not be taken for granted. The cultural chasm between rural, Bible-belt, social conservatives and workers who organized across the color line in the 1930s to secure their power in the workplace became apparent in both the political and social order of the city. The later 1940s reflected the dislocation felt by many who were new to Birmingham. “There was an edge to life in Birmingham – raw and brooding

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, interview, BCRI.

¹⁰¹ “Housing in Birmingham ,1949” Jimmie Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 10, File 21, BPLAD.

¹⁰² Daniel, Pete. *Lost Revolutions: the South in the 1950s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina for Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., 2000), 125.

– it was the rawness of a town still in the making,” wrote historian William Barnard, “the dark disquiet of rural people not yet adjusted to the harshness of the industrial order.”¹⁰³

Economic and political marginalization characterized the experiences of rural laborers who moved to the city in the immediate aftermath of the war. By the close of the 1940s, however, the recently rural makeup of Birmingham’s labor force influenced the city’s working-class politics by inflecting blue-collar culture with religious fundamentalism and conservative values, inflections which caught the ear of the city’s elite. The New Deal Democrats, a solid political force in the 1944 and 1946 elections in Alabama, had become, by 1948 an “affront to the conservative, rural-minded and rural dominated, if no longer rural South.”¹⁰⁴ Birmingham, the cradle of southern labor in the 1930s, became, by the close of the 1940s, the springboard for the Dixiecrats, the “hired agents of the absent landlords, who are Republicans,” according to Senator Lister Hill.

Gender identities of men in the working city carried political meaning in the post-war era. With the state seemingly ensconced in the liberal wing of the party in 1946 with Governor Folsom and Senators Hill and Sparkman, Alabama’s conservatives, wrote George Tindall, sought refuge within “the parapets of the embattled South, where they stood fast against the incursions of social change.”¹⁰⁵ Racial, as well as gender prescriptions, defined the insurgency against the liberals in Birmingham and obscured the pecuniary motivations of the men who lived over the mountain. The racial discourse that emerged in the post-war era supplied southern men with a set of cohesive values and practices to invigorate and unify an “imagined” fraternity of whiteness. Appeals to

¹⁰³ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 112.

¹⁰⁴ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 123.

¹⁰⁵ *Alabama: News Magazine of the Deep South*, Volume 12, Number 4, June 19, 1942, 3.

southern (white) tradition and Christianity from Dixon, Wilkinson, and other conservative leaders in Birmingham closed the chasm between the wealthy and working people of Birmingham who “held on grimly to old-time social and religious mores.”¹⁰⁶ Issues of morality such as prohibition, church attendance, and a southern man’s duty to his ancestors suffused political rhetoric bent toward issues of racial segregation, effectively placing disparate gender prescriptions of white southern men into the concentrated service of white supremacy. Morality and Christianity served as “tacit means to legitimate the cultural heritage and the existing values.”¹⁰⁷ DeBardeleben’s *Alabama* called, to all white men “who cherish the traditions of our state and the heritage of our fathers; we must to stand together in this battle to preserve things that we hold dear.”¹⁰⁸ Implicit in this message was the fusion of white supremacy and small-town agrarian, family-oriented values. DeBardeleben and his mouthpieces implored working men in Birmingham to identify with them and the city’s newer residents glommed onto the conservative and religious rhetoric of white, male supremacy.¹⁰⁹

In March of 1946, Herbert Stockham, President of Stockham Valves and Fittings, joined the campaign for a more conservative Alabama by presiding over the newly organized Committee for Better Government, Temperance, and Public Morality, a Christian based group that endorsed Folsom’s opponent in the 1946 gubernatorial race. In addition to the traditional discourse of race and the embattled southern way of life,

¹⁰⁶ Grantham, Dewey W. *The Life & Death of the Solid South: a Political History*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1988): 64.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel S. Hill, *Religion and the Solid South*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 52.

¹⁰⁸ *Birmingham News*, 21 May 1946.

¹⁰⁹ In his work, *Religion and the Solid South*, Samuel Hill argues that Prohibition in the South was used to signify an overall social reaction to the changing times. Samuel S. Hill, *Religion and the Solid South*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972).

Stockham, Dixon, and Wilkinson appealed to the religious tendencies of the region's white men and women. The strength of this appeal, according to historian Dewey Grantham, was its resonance with the South's "enduring conservatism in matters moral and social" which expressed itself through "a romantic willingness to be distracted from the hard, real problem of economic and class interests by quixotic crusades for some mystical goal of publicly enforced morality."¹¹⁰ Using conservative Christianity to underpin a campaign to perpetuate deep inequality across Birmingham, Stockham and his colleagues fused white supremacy with moral righteousness, a movement directed at poorer whites in Birmingham. Southern conservatism, insisted Grantham, "was not a political party; it was a social code and a state of mind."¹¹¹ Christianity and white, male supremacy resided at the heart of both the code and the conservative outlook.

Subsidized by the city's Big Mules, Horace Wilkinson began a local newspaper, the *Southern Outlook*, in which he advocated racial, rather than class, unity. As Baptist deacon and Sunday school president, Wilkinson discussed matters of white supremacy alongside illustrations of Bible stories.¹¹² Christianity buttressed an increasing conservatism on social issues, a movement which, according to southern historian William Barnard, gained support from the southern masses which "would not have been garnered on economic issues" but resonated with men in times of disorder.¹¹³ A strong

¹¹⁰ Dewey Grantham, *The Democratic South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1963): 55.

¹¹¹ Grantham, *The Democratic South*, 56.

¹¹² Feldman, Glenn. *From Demagogue to Dixiecrat: Horace Wilkinson and the Politics of Race*, (Lanham: University of America, 1995):128.

¹¹³ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 25.

source of identity and community, Wilkinson and his colleagues wielded Christianity to legitimate white supremacy over class consciousness.

Dixiecrats in Birmingham: “Christian Principles and the White Man’s Brains”

By 1948, Birmingham’s conservative forces came together with like-minded men from across the state to create a platform for all those things that they “held dear.” When Democrats elected President Harry Truman as the presidential nominee at the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia, self-proclaimed States’ Rights Democrats from the lower-South states walked out. Their discord with Truman stemmed from his actions on civil rights. Specifically, the newly formed Dixiecrats opposed the desegregation of the armed forces, as well as a string of legislative victories that promised to roll back restricted covenants and suffrage requirements. Led by Birmingham’s Bull Connor, the southern delegates agreed to meet in the steel city to outline their platform and elect a new democratic nominee to send to the White House. Leading up to the meeting, Frank Dixon proclaimed that the national party drove “a knife into the heart of the South.” He promised that the delegates in Birmingham would send a clear message to the Party that the Solid South could no longer be taken for granted.¹¹⁴ His statement proved prophetic.

On July 17, 1948, 6,000 white, southern democrats walked into the overheated Municipal Auditorium in Birmingham, the host of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare in the previous decade, to watch as Dixon rapped the meeting to order. Over the next two days, the States’ Rights Democrats crafted an eight-plank platform, “A Declaration of Principles” which insisted that the “powers needed for human rights be

¹¹⁴ John Popham, “Birmingham Set for Party Rebels Holding Rump Meeting Tomorrow,” *New York Times*, 16 July 1948.

returned to the people” and nominated, by acclamation, South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond as their presidential nominee and Mississippi Governor Fielding L. Wright for vice president.¹¹⁵ The atmosphere at the convention was an exaggerated bow to the region’s mythic past, a past which valorized the power of the southern man. A large picture of Robert E. Lee draped one wall and the stars and bars drooped on staffs adorning the stage while “sky-splitting” rebel yells greeted the succession of speechmakers. In between the scheduled oratory, men and women “snake-danced” to the tune of Dixie, and various chants, such as “To hell with the Yankees!” and “Drive the Quislings out!” resounded throughout the large hall.¹¹⁶ A slated speaker from Texas yelled from the platform that all of the nation’s problems were on the shoulders of New Englanders who “brought howling, screaming savages” to America from Africa while “Alfalfa Bill” Murray of Oklahoma underscored the message of racial essentialism by insisting that America’s greatness derived from “Christian principles and the white man’s brains.”¹¹⁷ Governor Thurmond added to the mood when assured the crowd that there were “not enough troops in the army to break down segregation and admit Negroes into our theaters, swimming pools, schools, and homes.”¹¹⁸ The last thing that the South will do, prodded Dixon, is “tuck its tail and vote for Truman. If we did, we would be nothing worse than cowards.” Seconding Dixon’s message of southern masculinity, Thurmond

¹¹⁵ Harlan Trott, “Bolting Democrats in South Form States’ Rights Party,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 July 1948.

¹¹⁶ Descriptions of atmosphere and appearance of Dixiecrat Convention in Birmingham come from John Popham, “Birmingham Set for Party Rebels Holding Rump Meeting Tomorrow,” *New York Times*, 16 July 1948 and Harlan Trott, “Bolting Democrats in South Form States’ Rights Party,” *Christian Science Monitor*.

¹¹⁷ John Popham, “Thurmond Candidate of Rebels, Decries White Supremacy Label,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1948.

¹¹⁸ Robert Howard, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 18 July 1948.

bellowed, “We have just begun to fight!” It was to be the party of men and the States’ Rights democrats would make sure that the looming racial and gender disorder could be pushed back by strong and determined men. Thurmond would be the name under the rooster. In the fall of 1948, the Alabama ballot did not have President Truman listed as the democratic candidate, only Thurmond’s name appeared below “the proud, white cock.”¹¹⁹

Truman won without the lower South in 1948 and his victory signaled a deathblow to the Dixiecrats. According to Birmingham union leader Amzi Barber, “The Dixiecrat Revolt” was “the last resort” for Alabama’s southern conservatives. “They are trying to save their political necks” and are only able to hang on because they receive “support from the moneyed interests.”¹²⁰ On April 12, 1949 Folsom and other Democratic Party Loyalists organized a major fundraising dinner in Birmingham, the Jefferson-Jackson dinner, to galvanize those democrats who were not Dixiecrats. Alabama’s party regulars, disillusioned by the absence of Truman’s name on the presidential ballot, invited Vice-President Alben Barkley to speak at the dinner. States’ Righters in Alabama raged against Barkley’s invitation, a man who, according to Dixiecrat Charles Collins, proved irreverent to the powerful in Alabama. Barkley had the “unmitigated gall to come into this State to make a brazen attempt at wedding the wood handle to the silver spoon.”¹²¹ J. Miller Bonner, former legislator, State’s Rights leader, and Big Mule ally, could not see “how any southern white man” could attend the

¹¹⁹ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 65.

¹²⁰ Barber, interview, Rasmussen Collection.

¹²¹ Collins to Frank Dixon, 6 April 1949, Dixon Papers, quote located in notes of Barnard’s *Dixiecrats and Democrats*, 183.

“Barkley anti-southern white man dinner.” He promised that no man would be elected in 1950 who “is ashamed to call himself a States’ Rights Democrat.”¹²² Frank Dixon, who was in Birmingham when 1,000 Alabama Democrats attended the gala, urged his fellow Dixiecrats to remain away from the new socialist party, “we simply can’t sit still and let the civilization of this region be sacrificed.”¹²³ The emotional appeal to a more traditional southern manhood provided Birmingham’s white men a course toward virility through political identification with the revolt. The Dixiecrat party, however, did not increase ordinary’s men power in either the home or the workplace; still, white supremacy held within it a traditional, conservative, male supremacist worldview that reassured men forced to submit to Birmingham’s industrial order. As southern writer and philosopher James McBride Dabbs put it, white men’s protection of white privilege became the protection of “his very identity.”¹²⁴

“The Morals of the Village”

On April 2, 1946, the Alabama Ku Klux Klan came back from the dead. Five crosses burned amidst a slow rain in Jefferson County’s steel mill neighborhoods of North Birmingham, ACIPCO, Powderly, Elmwood, and Tarrant City.¹²⁵ Soon after, William Morris, a roofing contractor, and Dr. E.P. Pruitt, an older Birmingham physician, filed incorporation papers for the new Birmingham Klan, citing “the protection of the chastity of white women and white supremacy” as the crusade’s central philosophy. The revival, Grand Dragon Morris claimed, was due “to outside meddlers trying to cram

¹²² *Birmingham News*, 13 March 1949.

¹²³ Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-50*, 138.

¹²⁴ Dabbs, *Who Speaks for the South*, 310.

¹²⁵ “Fiery KKK Crosses Warn South of New Terror,” *Chicago Defender*, 6 April 1946.

social equality down our throats.”¹²⁶ Malcolm Cotton Dobbs, Birmingham’s regional secretary for the Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW), disagreed. He believed that the new Klan was a reaction to the growing strength of interracial unions in U.S. Steel’s Birmingham plants. According to Dobbs, the city’s elite made the Klan possible and he claimed that “reactionary plantation owners and industrialists have no use for democracy.”¹²⁷ While crosses burned throughout Alabama, the Klan’s rolls surged in the mining districts of Walker and Jefferson counties where white men flocked to the newly incorporated bed-sheet order.¹²⁸ In 1949, in the wake of the Dixiecrat Movement, Alabama’s KKK held membership rolls of over 30,000 due paying members, 7,000 in Birmingham alone.¹²⁹ During the early summer, violence swept through the city’s working neighborhoods as blacks and poor whites found themselves targeted by a new Klan that was preoccupied with both racial and gender order.

In June 1949, the hooded organization rode across the state, setting fire to eighty-nine crosses and attacking over twenty Alabamians, most of whom were white women.¹³⁰ On the evening of June 11, twenty Birmingham Klansmen forced their way into the home of Edna McDanal, a middle-aged white woman, grabbed her, struck her, and pulled her outside in her nightgown to watch a cross burn on her lawn. According to

¹²⁶ “Klan Rises in Alabama: Asks Incorporation to Seek White Supremacy,” *New York Times*, 22 July 1946.

¹²⁷ “Many in South Seem Cool to Klan: Only a Small Minority There are Joining the Ku Klux, says Alabaman Here,” *New York Times*, 6 September 1946.

¹²⁸ Irving Beiman, “Alabama Veteran Group Demand Action,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 June 1949.

¹²⁹ Glenn Feldman, “Soft Opposition: Elite Acquiescence and Klan-Sponsored Terrorism in Alabama.” *Historical Journal* 40 (September 1997): 753-777.

¹³⁰ Glenn Feldman, “Soft Opposition: Elite Acquiescence and Klan-Sponsored Terrorism in Alabama.” *Historical Journal* 40 (September 1997): 764.

McDanal's testimony, her assailants accused her of renting rooms to unmarried couples, selling whiskey, and dancing naked on her front porch. Down the street from McDanal's home, a group of almost sixty hooded men crowded into cars and drove to Steve Marshlar's small café where the Greek owner served black and whites in segregated sections. The sheeted men barged into the small restaurant and pushed the black customers outside, forcing the stunned group to watch a cross burn. Another group whipped thirty-one year old Billy Stovall for leaving his children alone in his house.¹³¹ In the small town of Littleton, just outside of Jefferson County, seventeen hooded men entered a weeknight revival meeting where one Klan member replaced the itinerant preacher on the altar to lecture the congregation about rumors of un-Christian behaviors at home and truancy on the Sabbath. The Klansmen "warned darkly that the morals of the village must be kept at a high level."¹³² The alleged offenses included public and private "indecentcies." Nude dancing, entertaining men in the home, selling alcohol, and drinking prompted the Klan to go after white women. For white men, neglect of responsibilities in the workplace, church, or the home warranted a visit from the shrouded men.¹³³ The Ku Klux Klan had begun to police Birmingham's morals.

By the end of June 1949, Birmingham police had arrested seventeen white men for flogging, molesting, and intimidating residents. A grand jury was appointed and the State Attorney General Albert Carmichael convincingly claimed: "There will be no let up. We shall strike this bunch of bums on all fronts."¹³⁴ But the first grand jury never

¹³¹ "The South: A Call from the Neighbors," *New York Times*, 16 June 1949.

¹³² Paul Holmes, "Doff Masks, Grand Chief Orders Klan," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 26 June 1949.

¹³³ Holmes, "Doff Masks, Grand Chief Orders Klan."

¹³⁴ "Alabama: Hold Everything," *Time Magazine*, 25 July 1949.

convened on account of the fact that eighteen of the jury members and the Judge were either current or past members of the Klan. By November, a new trial was underway, “the biggest prosecution of the Ku Klux Klan since reconstruction days” though, according to one reporter, the trial appeared farcical. The reporter found Klansmen smiling and laughing “friendly-like” in the corridors of Birmingham’s courthouse, the old, white mustachioed Judge Robert J. Wheeler pausing to spit in his cuspidor, while the plump attorney for the defense rested on the table during cross-examination.¹³⁵ The star witness, Mrs. Edna McDanal, testified that she “snatched” the hoods from two of her captors while they held her in her nightgown before the burning cross. One of the unmasked men was, according to McDanal, Brownie Lollar, a coal mine operator and special deputy sheriff. An additional witness claimed that she recognized Lollar’s voice when he and a group of hooded men hauled her mother, her sister, three male visitors, and herself out to the woods to kneel them before a praying preacher before whipping them with a rope. A fellow Klan member testified before the grand jury that he was with Lollar at McDanal’s house. The evidence was damning but when the all-white, male jury returned with a verdict of not guilty after quick deliberation, the courtroom broke into applause.¹³⁶ The power of the Klan, after only three years, was compelling.

Even as Birmingham’s Klan garnered support from the local justice system, the high incidence of terrorism in 1949 in Jefferson County prompted state and federal justice departments to investigate Alabama’s Klan. The investigators soon agreed with the conclusion reached by Dobbs in 1946: that the town’s industrial elites, the Big Mules

¹³⁵ “It Sure Was Pretty,” *Time Magazine*, 7 November 1949.

¹³⁶ “It Sure was Pretty.”

of the city held a vested interest in a divided working class; that moneyed men financed and directed the Klan in the steel town. As Alabama Attorney General Carmichael reported to federal investigators, the “orders for the floggings came from behind the mahogany desks of the big office buildings in Birmingham.”¹³⁷ The U.S. department of justice put the “powerful business interests behind the Dixiecrat movement and the hooded terrorism in Alabama . . . with the deliberate purpose of inflaming race prejudice before the primary campaigns begin.”¹³⁸

Birmingham’s Big Mules were in it for the bottom line; the rise of biracial unions in the 1930s and 1940s threatened the division that protected unorganized and cheap labor and kept U.S. Steel in town.¹³⁹ However, the ideals which inspired poorer men to carry out the orders of Birmingham’s overseers are more complex and hold within them the subtle strength of southern racism. White supremacy empowered all white men to direct blacks as well as white women and children, a tempting source of authority in times of economic or social crisis. The expanded agenda not only to intimidate black community members but also to act as sentinels of southern white morality betrays a growing anxiety concerning the power of patriarchy in the urban South. The Klan and their deep-pocketed backers aligned integrated restaurants, drinking women, and absentee fathers as threats similar in nature in an effort to unite men cramped into mines with those tucked behind mahogany desks.

¹³⁷ Robert S. Allen, “Business Held Backing KKK,” *Washington Post*, 28 June 1949.

¹³⁸ Robert S. Allen, “Business Held Backing KKK.”

¹³⁹ Michael Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them, Birmingham, Alabama faces the Civil Rights Movement, 1963” (Senior Honors Thesis, Brown University, 1974).

Conclusion

Although ideas about family and masculinity worked as powerful ideological vehicles to create a shared identity of southern whiteness, some white workers in Birmingham remained unmoved. Birmingham's white union men were not wooed by the promise of Christian, traditional manhood espoused by the Big Mules and their "errand boys." In 1951, TCI's black coke workers walked away from their ovens. Because of the dangerous and extremely hot conditions of the coke oven, only African Americans worked this job. The men walked out over the company's refusal to amend the summer manning practices – the strikers wanted more men working the ovens when the sweltering summer temperatures made the heat of the ovens unbearable, and the extra men would afford the coke workers needed breaks while on their shift.¹⁴⁰ When the black coke workers walked out in 1951, white union men across TCI walked out with them.¹⁴¹ DeBardeleben's *Alabama* belittled their grievance, "thousands of workers are out of jobs because a few Negroes decided not to work," the papers declared. The Chamber of Commerce, led by William P. Engle, a prosperous realtor, Mayor Cooper Green, anti-labor representative Laurie Battle, and Reverend John Buchanan of Southside Baptist Church appealed to workers to call off the strike and called in CIO trouble shooters to end the strike. Engel urged the men to return to the mines "for the boys in Korea." When asked why they were willing to lose wages on account of a few "Negroes who decided not to work," one white worker replied, "I do not think of them as Negroes, they are union men and they have a just grievance . . . I would not work at a

¹⁴⁰ Judith Stein, "Southern Workers in National Unions," p. 202-206.

¹⁴¹ Judith Stein, "Southern Workers in National Unions," p. 202-206.

coke oven for \$50 a day.”¹⁴² The strike stands as evidence that racial solidarity had not completely eclipsed class consciousness by the beginning of the 1950s. Birmingham’s CIO members remained dedicated to the union.

Even though Truman won without the lower South and class solidarity persisted beyond the Dixiecrat revolution, Birmingham’s conservatives successfully crafted a southern meta-narrative that bifurcated Christianity and integration, southern, white manhood and interracial cooperation in the years following World War II. The city’s Big Mules battled interracial unionism and working-class consciousness from the turn of the century, but their tactics which included violence and restricted suffrage were not enough to terminally weaken interracial cooperation. The industrial order encountered by a generation of white, southern families destabilized the underpinnings of traditional, southern patriarchy.

Birmingham’s overseers took advantage of an insecurity wrought by economic instability and the humbling machinations of the urban workplace by wedding white supremacy to Christian, male supremacy. According to historian Dewey Grantham, their declining economic and social status “made them more than ever the great conservators of the South.”¹⁴³ The unsettled status of the southern, white male became functional for racial solidarity at the expense of class unity. That identity politics tempted American workers away from class power is not unique to Birmingham in the twentieth century, nor is the notion that the shift from field to factory is a burdensome transition on gender ideals or that gender crisis amplified the allure of white supremacy.

¹⁴² Quote found in letter from Walter White, 1951, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 18, File 36, BPLAD.

¹⁴³ Grantham, Dewey W. *The Life & Death of the Solid South: a Political History*, 123.

What makes Birmingham a provocative case study is that those who directed racial animosity in Birmingham in the 1940s, by the 1960s, had designed a new southern archetype, the respectable and progressive businessman, a model that would effectively lay the lion's share of race hate at the feet of the city's workers.

CHAPTER THREE “THE MOST EXALTED IMPULSE OF MAN”

On March 1, 1956, the North Alabama White Citizens' Council published the first edition of *The Southerner: News of the Citizens' Council*, a monthly Birmingham newspaper devoted to the preservation of racial segregation. In the opening letter to their readers, editors Asa “Ace” Carter and Jesse Mabry explained their reasons for selecting *The Southerner* as the title of the new paper. “The Southerner is known,” the letter began; “he is proud of his race, proud of his independence and his pride is sunk deeply into the traditions built for him by his fathers and mothers of the Southland.” Encouraging fellow southerners to resist integration, Carter and Mabry chastised those who sought conciliation. “Let all the weak fall by the wayside,” they wrote, “the compromisers sound their flaccid mutterings and the cowards hide in their chosen corners. We intend to fight.”¹ By evoking their version of symbolic southern man, Carter and Mabry challenged their readers to remember the sacrifices of those who had come before as well as to stand up as men willing to fight for “the southern way of life.”

Gallantly gracing the cover of each paper, a mounted Confederate war hero's portrait and biography served to remind the reader of the blood seeped beneath the southern soil and of their duty as white, southern men. The pages of each edition abounded with images of white women touching and embracing black men. Ancestral sacrifice and interracial sex existed as the twin themes of every edition of *The Southerner*. Warning his readers about the sexual implications of integration, Carter directed Birmingham's white men to stand guard against the “change in the minds of the

¹ *The Southerner: News of the Citizens' Council*, March 1956, 1, Jefferson County White Citizens' Council Papers, Collection 1763, BPLAD.

negro people,” the change which, according to Carter could be gauged by every day observances, “you have seen it, the fleeting leer, the look that stays an instant longer . . . the savagery, now, almost to the surface.”²

Although an exaggerated expression of southern, white mythology in the age of integration, *the Southerner* expressed anxieties which propelled resistance throughout the 1950s in Birmingham and the South. The architects of massive resistance, from the demagogic politicians to the Big Mules to the Grand Dragons of the Klan, catered their rhetoric and their apocalyptic scenarios directly to southern male anxiety. Still, the hyper visibility of men and the struggle for white, southern manhood’s reification within the backlash of the 1950s is yet to be fully interrogated.

The appeal of massive resistance in the 1950s and early 1960s can be located in racial and gendered anxieties of the era.³ By selecting a particular phase in Birmingham’s history during which massive resistance saturated white society, this chapter examines how white racial extremism moved from the periphery in the early 1950s to the center by the end of the decade. Of this period in Birmingham, Alabama historian J. Mills Thornton writes: “For whatever reason, the white moderates retreated, suddenly and completely into cowering silence. These years saw virtually all white dissent from segregationist orthodoxy disappear and sentiments once thought extreme became acceptable, indeed usual.”⁴ Birmingham’s whites acceded not only to the bombastic and hateful speech of the day; they also quietly accepted torched homes and

²*The Southerner: News of the Citizens’ Council*, September/October 1956, 16.

³ K. A. Cuordileone, “Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis American Masculinity, 1949–1960,” *Journal of American History* 87 (September 2000):515-545.

⁴ J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 195.

grizzly violence against the city's black men and women. Because of the working-class character of Birmingham, the brutish violence which overwhelmed the city in the 1950s and early 1960s has largely been attributed to the lower, economic strata of white society. However, the fusion of middle-class mores and racial moderation was a post-1961 phenomenon in Birmingham. Even after whites were nestled comfortably in their bedroom suburbs over Red Mountain, many returned to the city to take part in the politics of white supremacy.

Exploring the multi-layered resistance in Birmingham, this chapter demonstrates that the white backlash in the city was a cross-class phenomenon to challenge the accepted wisdom that vehement white supremacy bubbled to the surface of society from the lower classes. Among whites, a reactionary consensus developed among men fastened in collars, both white and blue, living in city as well as suburb. The later 1950s was an era of unprecedented collusion between white union men, businessmen, and politicians in a city renowned for its class divisions. The beginning of this chapter demonstrates the vertical nature of massive resistance in Birmingham after *Brown*, from the legal community to the lower-class workers to the city's elites – whites from the very bottom to the very top of Birmingham's social ladder mobilized to fight integration. The second part of this chapter outlines the social, political, and cultural landscape of Birmingham in this period to contextualize the anxieties felt by white men throughout city and suburb. Finally, the third part of this chapter addresses questions of causality and the centrality of southern manhood to white resistance.

Much has been written about the reasons for white resistance: the scars of cultural transmission, the monetary and psychological advantages of whiteness, as well as

deeply-held religious beliefs. The gendered discourse of Alabama's Big Mules and Dixiecrats played a central role in Birmingham's backlash. In the city, men across the economic strata financed, organized, and committed atrocities in the name of Alabama's politics of hate. However, the majority of men, from the unskilled laborer to the college-educated businessman, did not. With painfully few exceptions, white men remained silent as racial extremism swallowed their city. In the years following the Supreme Court ruling on school integration, reactionary forces in Birmingham stitched together a new, southern white man whose first claim to manhood was fealty to segregation. Using the rhetoric of public officials, white supremacist organization members, citizen letter writers, as well as an exploration into the specific sites of violence in Birmingham, the latter portion of this chapter demonstrates how massive resistance became a function of and functional for anxious, white men. Birmingham's segregationists effectively turned issues of race and racial equality into battles over southern, white Christian manhood and, in so doing, rallied white resistance as well as pressured assent to its most destructive manifestations.⁵

Birmingham after *Brown*

In the early 1950s, white opinions regarding the primacy of racial segregation were diverse. In addition to the biracial strike on behalf of TCI's black coke workers in 1951,

⁵ Although white women in Birmingham took part of the white backlash in Birmingham, men played the most visible and vocal roles in the sites of backlash: municipal politics, local organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the White Citizen's Councils, the National States Rights Party, and in political letter writing efforts to the Birmingham City Commission and editorial writers to the *Birmingham News* and the *Birmingham Post-Herald*. With very few exceptions, the histories of southern whites who lived through the civil rights era are stories of men: men devoted to the safety of their wives and sisters, men who are ever mindful of their own and their children's psychological and economic advantages under Jim Crow, and men who stand firmly together, anxious to stem the tide of integration and federal interference. Yet, southern manhood throughout the era remains unexplored. As southern white men lost many of the advantages that whiteness afforded them as well as a very public struggle against federal encroachment, a shift in the ideals of manhood took root.

white and black middle-class men and women formed the Interracial Citizens Committee the same year. The newly elected, racially moderate City Commission included Mayor James Morgan, Public Safety Commissioner Robert Lindbergh, and Commissioner of Public Improvements, Wade Bradley. These commissioners expressed support for both integrated professional sports and an integrated police force. By the early spring of 1954, almost three years had passed since the last incident of Klan violence, the Interracial Committee remained strong and Eugene “Bull” Connor, who had departed his post amidst scandal, appeared to be political history. In January of 1954, the City Commissioners voted unanimously to repeal the 1950 ban on interracial professional sports. “We believe that this action,” they stated, “will meet with the approval of all right-thinking citizens.”⁶

However, this small step forward elicited a vigorous response from both sides of the issue. “Stick to your guns when the demagogues try to destroy this move,” wrote one local man to Mayor Morgan.⁷ “You can’t hold a man down in the gutter without staying down there with him,” added a white female citizen.⁸ “You should be commended...there are a great many people in Birmingham who support you.”⁹ To have kept the ban on the books, according to Mayor Morgan, “would have done the city untold injury by branding it before the world as a backward and benighted community.”¹⁰

⁶ *Birmingham News*, 17 September 1953.

⁷ W.P. Ingram to Mayor Morgan, 15 February 1954, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 19, Folder 6, BPLAD.

⁸ Ms. Pat King to Mayor Morgan, 18 September 1953, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 19, Folder 1, BPLAD.

⁹ E.M. Friend to Mayor Morgan, 2 February 1954, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 19, Folder 6, BPLAD.

¹⁰ “City to End Racial Ban,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 18 September 1953.

Backward, however, did not hold a negative connotation for all. “It seems a lot of our people are afraid of being called unstylish or backward if they even mention the word segregation. Mr. Connor stands alone . . . and is not afraid of taking a stand and voicing his opinion like a man,” wrote Mabry in an editorial published by the *Birmingham News*.¹¹ Nostalgic appeals for times past characterized most of the letters of opposition to the modern issue of integrated professional sports. “If the Proud Old South is doomed to bow her head in shame – it will not be because of Unprincipled White Scalawags within her own borders,” wrote one group of men from the neighboring city of Bessemer.¹² In response to the “weakening of the city fathers,” Birmingham attorney Hugh Locke, Sr., organized a group of Birmingham’s prominent businessmen to protest sport’s integration.¹³ Building upon a preoccupation with the Civil War and home rule, the newly formed group, christening themselves the American States’ Rights Association, circulated a “Segregation Extension Petition” to bring back the ban on interracial sports and to expand the ban to interracial swimming in pools, beaches, lakes, or ponds. Interracial swimming pools were already illegal, but Locke effectively tied pro sports with young people swimming together in order to rally whites who might otherwise not mind attending an integrated professional football game. By the end of March, he had gathered the necessary 10,000 signatures to put the ban to a city-wide vote to be held on June 1.

¹¹ *Birmingham News*, 14 October 1953.

¹² Letter to Mayor Morgan from Bessemer with list of signatures, January 1954, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 17, Folder 3, BPLAD.

¹³ D.W. Ramien to Mayor Morgan, 29 January 1954, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 19, Folder 6, BPLAD.

The local African-American newspaper, the *Birmingham World*, noted the petition and urged the local white leadership not to “retreat into timid silence.”¹⁴ Throughout March, April, and the beginning of May 1954, Birmingham’s residents on both sides of the issue remained vocal. Groups such as the Birmingham Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Young Men’s Business Club, and many individual citizens continued to editorialize in the local papers. Many wrote city commissioners in support of their progressive stance on sport’s integration, but, on May 17, 1954 – the day of the *Brown* decision – the letters stopped. Two weeks later, by a margin of almost three to one, “Angry Birmingham” voted for full sports segregation.¹⁵

The 1954 Supreme Court ruling flung Alabama into the civil rights movement and the concomitant maelstrom. In 1955, Rosa Parks kicked off the Montgomery Bus Boycott; Autherine Lucy attempted to integrate the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa the following year. By 1957, the political landscape of Birmingham was dramatically different from just three years previous. Whereas dissimilarity characterized white opinions on racial integration in the spring of 1954, by 1957, public opinion regarding the primacy of segregation was eerily uniform.¹⁶ In addition to the Locke’s American States’ Rights Association (ASRA), the Committee for Constitutional Government (CCG), a local chapter of the National States’ Rights Party (NSRP), and twenty-five chapters of the Alabama Citizen’s Council (ACC) were new to the city.¹⁷ The

¹⁴ “Promotion of Prejudice,” *Birmingham World*, 26 March 1954.

¹⁵ “Angry Birmingham Votes Full Sports Segregation, 13,646 against 4,668,” *Dallas News*, 2 June 1954.

¹⁶ The amplification of white resistance and the silence of any dissenters is discussed in J. Mills Thornton’s *Dividing Lines*, p. 195.

¹⁷ Bobby M. Wilson, *Race and Place in Birmingham: The Civil Rights Movement and Neighborhood Movements* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc); 81.

Birmingham Ku Klux Klan reemerged during this period with seven distinct Klaverns across Birmingham.¹⁸ The Interracial Citizens Committee (ICC), the only formal channel of interracial communication in Birmingham, disbanded in 1956 due to economic and public pressure from the American States' Rights Association while a list of the members was published in *The Southerner* to warn Birmingham's citizens of this "mongrelizing mob."¹⁹

During the same year, the Alabama Legislature outlawed the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). By the spring of 1957, white supremacists in Birmingham surveyed their city from a position of dominance. There were five large organizations in Jefferson County with chapters throughout the city dedicated to the preservation of racial segregation and the membership ranged from Birmingham's wealthiest and most powerful men to the rank and file of the smelter economy.²⁰

The reverberations of the aggressive mobilization and organization of segregationist forces in Birmingham beginning in 1954 were extensive. Cries against integration emanated from newspapers, local organizations, neighborhood associations, the legal community, and state and city government officials. Birmingham's two white newspapers, the *Birmingham Post-Herald* and the *Birmingham News*, after taking moderate stances on the *Brown* decision initially, came to reflect the feeling of hysteria in the city. By 1956, both the *Post-Herald* and the *News* advocated total segregation in

¹⁸Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 302-303.

¹⁹ *The Southerner: News of the Citizens' Council*, April/May 1956, 2a.

²⁰ These organizations include American States' Rights, the Ku Klux Klan, Committee for Constitutional Government, White Citizens Council of Alabama, and National State's Rights Party (NSRP).

public parks, schools, and on buses branding civil rights activists “trouble makers” and “rabble rousers.” Consistently, both papers printed editorials warning citizens of the purported dangers of integration and the *News* often reprinted Commissioner Bull Connor’s attacks on proponents of desegregation, a privilege never extended to those under attack.²¹

Birmingham even broadcast a white supremacist radio show. Beginning in September 1954, the voice of devoted segregationist and Klan member Ace Carter boomed through radios across Birmingham, two times a day, five days a week.²² Born and raised in Oxford, Alabama, Carter left Calhoun County to serve in the navy during World War II. Following his service, Carter married India Thelma Walker and studied journalism at the University of Colorado, where he honed his natural proclivity for the power of language. Although he went on to write award-winning books, Carter’s most notable production was Governor George Wallace’s famous 1963 inauguration speech wherein he promised, “Segregation now! Segregation tomorrow! Segregation forever!” a line written for him by Carter. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Birmingham’s most vocal segregationist created and edited *The Southerner: News of the Citizens’ Council*, founded the Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy, and worked as a speech writer for Wallace.²³

²¹ Robert Corley, “The Quest for Racial Harmony,” 168.

²² Dan Carter, “The Transformation of a Klansmen,” *New York Times*, 4 October 1991. Asa Carter was a member of the Ensley Klan Klavern No. 31.

²³ Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Glenn Eskew, *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*. Asa Carter went on to become a vocal advocate for the rights of Native Americans and an award-winning author under the pen name, Forrest Carter. His most famous works include *The Rebel Outlaw: Josie Wales* (1975) and *The Education of Little Tree* (1975). *Josie Wales* was later turned into a movie, *The Outlaw Josie Wales*, starring Clint Eastwood.

Carter's first major effect on Birmingham's discourse of resistance came by way of radio. Sponsored by the American States' Rights Association, a supremacist group whose ranks included William Hoover, the president of Employers Insurance Company, and Sydney Smyer, president of the Birmingham's largest realty company, Carter's radio show, "The History You and I are Making" provided a platform for Carter and the ASRA to expound upon "matters which are important to us all" such as the Communist agenda behind the civil rights movement and the embattled position of southern manhood. "The Communist wants the tearing down and the amalgamation into an irresponsible, mongrelized mass," Carter told his audience, amalgamation which "crosses the lines set down by God and destroys the finer elements of man."²⁴

Moving beyond radio, the ASRA also distributed leaflets throughout Birmingham, most of which concerned the discrepancy between venereal disease and illegitimate birth rates by state between whites and blacks. Olin Horton, president of ASRA, distributed these comparisons in neatly columned paper on a regular basis, both to association members and to the local papers.²⁵ Racial degradation through miscegenation became the key plank in the ASRA platform against integration. Horton and others combed through national papers to gather data to confirm their worst fears, a mania that seemed to move from the ASRA to Birmingham's white citizens' councils through the man of Ace Carter.²⁶ Kicked out of the ASRA for widening his attack to the Jewish community, Carter found a new home in the North Alabama Citizens' Council.

²⁴ Transcript from Asa Carter's radio show, "The History you and I are Making" on 21 February 1955. American States' Rights Association Papers, Collection 416, Box 1, Files 1-29, BPLAD.

²⁵ "Some Thoughts on Racial Integration," American States' Rights Association Papers, Collection 416, Box 1, File 4, BPLAD.

²⁶ American States' Rights Association Papers, Collection 416, Box 1, Files 1-29, BPLAD.

Birmingham and its environs boasted twenty-five Citizens' Council chapters whose membership claimed to be representative of both city and suburb.²⁷ In his study of the Birmingham's White Citizen Council movement, Robert Corley quotes one contemporary observer who argued that the Council's real strength had never been in "mass membership," but instead "its access to the institutions of power and control, and by those measurements, the resistance forces remained strong."²⁸ "You had doctors, lawyers, business, professional men, regular workers, every day people, people that love their children, people that remembered reading history, people who wanted to look out for the future generation of their children, just all walks of life," reported Charles Rice, a past member of the North Birmingham chapter of the Alabama Citizen Council.²⁹ As a testament to the vertical membership in Birmingham's Councils and the accompanying division that came with it, one contemporary noted that the Council's disputes were largely a, "part of the old feud between the Bourbon and the Redneck."³⁰ While many of Birmingham's elite white men joined openly racist associations, other political and economic leaders in the city organized in groups such as the "Committee for Constitutional Government" which touted a broader conservative program. Whereas many of Birmingham's business leaders did not officially join the ranks of those fighting

²⁷ Charles Rice, interview with Jane S. England, 19 April 1979, White Citizens' Council Oral Histories Collection, University of Alabama, William Stanley Hoole Special Collections (hereafter WSHSC).

²⁸ Robert Corley, "The Quest for Racial Harmony," 152.

²⁹ Rice, interview, WSHSC.

³⁰ Brian Ward, "Race, Politics and Culture: The Cole Incident of 1956," in R. Halpern and M. Stokes, (eds), *Race and Class in the American South Since 1890* (Berg Publishers, 1994), 187. Quote originally found in Douglas Cater, "Civil War in Alabama's Citizens' Council," *The Reporter*, 17 May 1956, 20.

to preserve segregation, they “nevertheless comprised a significant portion of the conservative consensus supporting that objective.”³¹

Birmingham’s political organizations were matched by the city’s legal community, which moved quickly to duck the impending desegregation of public schools. On February 10, 1956, the Alabama legislature drafted a resolution declaring that the Supreme Court decision to be “null, void, and of no effect.”³² In July of the same year, Joseph P. Johnston, a partner in a Birmingham law firm and grandson of a former Alabama Governor Joseph F. Johnston, presented a list of legislative options to the Alabama state bar association in anticipation of a constitutional challenge to segregated schools in the state. Following Johnston’s speech, the Association’s almost 300 lawyers unanimously issued an official statement charging that *Brown* was in direct conflict with both the constitution and legal precedent. The Alabama Bar Association resolved to use “all honorable and legal means” to contest the decision.³³ In an article published in the *Alabama Lawyer* one month later, Johnston had moved past the questions of legality and into the familiar rhetoric of the threatened South, “The Southern public school system,” he declared, “is prepared to throw itself over the cliff if pursued to its edge by the Federal Marshall.”³⁴

Senator Albert Boutwell of Birmingham, along with a committee assigned by the state to investigate Alabama’s best chance to avoid school integration, worked with

³¹ Ward, “Race, Politics and Culture: The Cole Incident of 1956,” 153.

³² “Resolution Made by the Alabama Legislature” 10 February 1956, American States Rights Papers, BPLAD.

³³ *Birmingham News*, 19 July 1956.

³⁴ Joseph P. Johnston, “Schools, the Supreme Court and the States’ Power to Direct the removal of Gunpowder,” *Alabama Lawyer*, 17 (August, 1956) p. 22.

Johnston on what came to be called, the “Freedom of Choice” plan: a proposed tri-party school system which made some schools all white, some all black, and some integrated; parents could choose which school was best for their child. To advocate the “Freedom of Choice” plan, Senator Boutwell made over 100 speeches on a statewide tour.³⁵ Birmingham’s municipal leadership supported Boutwell’s proposal and corresponded candidly regarding the difficulty facing anyone who chose to challenge the plan. Between 1954 and 1956, racial segregation became a priority among Birmingham whites. In 1957, Connor returned to his post as Commissioner of Public Safety on a pledge to obey only those laws which were “written for the South and Alabama.”³⁶ *Brown* brought Bull Connor’s booming voice and defensive stance back to Birmingham. “If the North keeps trying to cram this thing down our throats,” he warned, “there is going to be bloodshed.”³⁷

Birmingham’s financial and political leaders created an atmosphere, frenzied at times, wherein the primacy of segregation became absolute. In a city conspicuously layered and organized by class, Birmingham’s white men did not cohere on any issue before *Brown*. In its aftermath, the more extreme forces of white resistance successfully employed gendered rhetoric to negotiate Birmingham’s deep social fragmentation. The city’s extremists gained almost undisputed hegemony from 1956 – 1960, where none had previously existed. From the newspapers, to the radio, from formal announcements by the City Commission to informal meetings in parking lots, the city was awash in Massive Resistance.

³⁵ Robert Corley, “The Quest for Racial Harmony,” 157.

³⁶ *Birmingham News*, 22 April 1957.

³⁷ “Birmingham: Integration’s Hottest Crucible” *Time Magazine*, 15 December 1958.

Imperiled Patriarchy

On July 30, 1952, the *Birmingham Post-Herald* reported the findings of the 1950 U.S. Census with an article entitled, "Birmingham Leads the South in Non-Whites."³⁸ Totalling almost two-fifths of the city's population, the proportion of Birmingham's non-white population was the largest in the region, surpassing that of both Memphis and Atlanta.³⁹ In addition to the rising number of African Americans, Birmingham also attracted many more new residents from the southern countryside. Between 1940 and 1950, the city's population increased by 58,000, but a great many more were recent citizens of Birmingham when the flight to the surrounding white suburbs is taken into account.⁴⁰

On July 15, 1953, the *Birmingham News* reported the findings of the 1950 census with an article entitled, "Birmingham Women Outnumber Men."⁴¹ "It's a woman's world," proclaimed Lane Carter of the *Birmingham News*, when the census numbers returned showing almost 14,000 more women than men in a population just above 326,000.⁴² More of the "so-called gentler sex" had joined the work force, about 13,000 more since the last census and the education level of women and men in Birmingham was competitive by 1960.⁴³ The 1950s witnessed a decline in gender inequality across all

³⁸ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 30 July 1952.

³⁹ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 30 July 1952. Ninety-seven percent of the non-white population listed were African-American.

⁴⁰ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Seventeenth Census, vol. 2, General Characteristics of the Population, Alabama, pt. 2, Detailed Characteristics, tables 77,87.

⁴¹ Lane Carter, "Women Outnumber Men in Jefferson, City" 30 July 1952.

⁴² Lane Carter, "Women Outnumber Men in Jefferson, City," *Birmingham News*, 30 July 1952..

⁴³ Information compiled in the 1960 Audit of Birmingham, found in the Tutwiler Special Collections at BPL. 5.8 percent (8,580) of men had attended four or more years of school while the number was only slightly lower for women, 4.6 percent (7,590). More generally, Birmingham's women went to school longer

classes. While many lower-class women joined the work force out of necessity, Birmingham's married middle-class women increasingly chose to pick up part-time work.⁴⁴ Along with work outside of the house, the link between southern femininity and motherhood became less absolute as one-third of Birmingham's women had only one child or were not mothers at all.⁴⁵ With more money and time on their hands, Birmingham's women began to move out of the patriarchal confines of the region's past.

Along with the religiosity of Alabama's Bible belt examined in the previous chapter, men and women from Alabama's countryside also brought more modern rituals which contributed to a burgeoning youth culture centered on fast cars and loud music.⁴⁶ Friday nights in Birmingham saw tens and often hundreds of cars, packed with teenagers, parked on the field near the Birmingham WSGS's Sky Castle to listen the sounds of Elvis Presley, Gene Vincent, Carl Perkins, and Fats Domino. The young Birmingham residents often ended the evening with late night drag races around what came to be known as "thrill hill," an area where local adults complained of teenagers "rat racing, hitting baseball bats against mailboxes, dragging garbage cans, running across lawns and swearing."⁴⁷

averaging a ninth grade education while the average man in Birmingham did not complete the eighth grade.

⁴⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Seventeenth Census, vol. 2, General Characteristics of the Population, Alabama, pt. 2, Detailed Characteristics, tables 77,87.

⁴⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, Seventeenth Census, vol. 2, General Characteristics of the Population, Alabama, pt. 2, Detailed Characteristics, tables 77,87.

⁴⁶ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: the South in the 1950s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina for Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., 2000).

⁴⁷ Photograph and short account of the weekend night social gatherings around WSGN's Sky Castle come from Jim Bagget, *Historic Photos of Birmingham* (Turner Publishing Company) 2006. Accounts of the drag racing can be found throughout the local letters written to Mayor Jimmie Morgan and the Birmingham Police Department throughout the 1950s. Jimmie Morgan's Papers, Collection 266, Box 19,

Youth was a national if not a global obsession by the middle of the 1950s. Raised by parents who lived through the Depression and World War II, the American teenager of the 1950s became a wholly new phenomenon. Aided by the luxury of time and the spectacles of popular culture, the young men and women of the 1950s created a distinct subculture in America; they were “the nation’s first generation of ‘teenagers,’” writes historian William Graebner.⁴⁸ Their unique and anti-authoritative posture in society was evidenced not only through the emergence of a mass market geared toward these new consumers of the 1950s such as the film and fashion industries, but also through the panic that swept the adult nation regarding the excesses and the rebellion of the new American teenager. Elvis Presley, more than any other person of his time, signified the cultural rift between the young and old, a clash of taste regarding both Presley’s music, as well as his unconcealed sexuality. Describing an Elvis Presley performance in 1957, a *Time* Magazine writer penned: “In a pivoting stance, his hips swing sensuously from side to side and his entire body takes on a frantic quiver, as if he had swallowed a jackhammer. Full-cut hair tousles over his forehead, and sideburns frame his petulant, full-lipped face His throat seems full of desperate aspirates or hiccupping glottis strokes, and his diction is poor. But his movements suggest, in a word, sex.”⁴⁹

While many American parents in the 1950s organized suburban bonfires to set Presley’s albums ablaze and public personalities ranted against the “grunt and groin antics” of Elvis “The Pelvis” Presley, America’s teenagers fell in love with the “drape-

BPLAD. Letter quoted came from a man living in Birmingham who wrote to Connor and Hanes, 27 July 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 2, File 58, BPLAD.

⁴⁸ William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University press):

⁴⁹ “Teener’s Hero,” *Time Magazine*, 14 May 1957.

suited, tight-trousered young man” from Tupelo, Mississippi and the freedom of his music and his movements.⁵⁰ In Birmingham, adults linked Elvis and rock ‘n’ roll with the larger problems of juvenile delinquency and racial integration. The newspapers in Birmingham reported the rising tide of juvenile delinquency in the 1950s and local residents railed against the drag racing, the threat caused by the “black leather jackets” and the general “rowdyism” of Birmingham’s youth.⁵¹ Visual manifestations of the new youth sub-culture were everywhere from the big screen to the hair and dress of the young.⁵² James Dean, Marlon Brando, ducktail hairstyles, black leather jackets, and stovepipe jeans signified an overt break with the dominant adult culture. However, more than anything else, it was rock and roll, the “sensual Negro music,” as one Alabamian referred to it,⁵³ which carried the fear of youth rebellion to a frenzy. “From the unholy alliance between white, youth subculture and black music . . . the American teenager stepped forth.”⁵⁴

As their young embraced new forms of rebellion, working-class men in Birmingham faced difficult times. Technological advances and the disintegration of

⁵⁰ “Teener’s Hero,” *Time Magazine*, 14 May 1957.

⁵¹ *The Birmingham News* reported that in Jefferson County, juvenile delinquency rates had increased by 14.3 percent between 1948 and 1954, *Birmingham News* 12 April 1956. Letter to Morgan from Arlene Bell regarding rowdyism at football games, 30 September 1955, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 18, File 36, BPLAD; Commission of the City of Birmingham Investigation into Connor’s Police Department, listed as a flawed: “prevention of juvenile delinquency,” 8 February 1962, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 22, File 2; Letter to Morgan, 12 September 1955, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 22, File.3, BPLAD.

⁵² In his study on postwar Buffalo, historian William Graebner argues that the era saw not just one youth subculture but many depending on socioeconomic class. The music, the dress, and the activities of the white middle class differed from those of the working class teens in Buffalo, New York. The same is true in Birmingham. However, adult concerns over the youth culture in Birmingham stemmed from shared fears of antiauthoritarianism, delinquency, slackened moral standards, and an overriding obsession with interracial contact, whether it be cultural, social, or sexual contact. Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo*.

⁵³ *The Southerner*, March 1956.

⁵⁴ Ian Chambers, “A Strategy for Living,” *Resistance Through Ritual: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, 158.

national unions in Birmingham left working men's jobs in jeopardy. The mechanization of labor made its first big impact in Birmingham in 1937 when automatic tables eliminated the roughers and catchers from the sheet mill and the continuous strip mill reduced the number of rollers.⁵⁵ Just over a decade later, in the 1950s, technology targeted miners. Mechanized loaders and "continuous miners" which sheared and loaded coal in a single process eliminated over 97 percent of Alabama's underground hand loading and the need for human drilling and blasting underground.⁵⁶ According to a woman living in Birmingham at the time, the "continuous miner" at the Docena mine was just one of the "many, many changes that came to our small village" in the 1950s which altered the landscape of labor.⁵⁷

In 1955, when the AFL and CIO began to negotiate a merger which would continue the CIO's practice of interracial organization, whites across Birmingham – tempered by the *Brown* decision -rebelled against the idea of a national organization making decisions for southern labor. By the close of the 1950s, the city's whites had departed from their historic alliance with the CIO and forged new and less powerful unions to fight the onslaught of mechanization.⁵⁸ According to Robert Norrell's work on the effects of the merger on Birmingham's unions, Birmingham's locals, the American

⁵⁵ Judith Stein "Southern Workers in National Unions: Birmingham Steelworkers, 1933-1951," *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South*, ed. Robert Zieger, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 183-222.

⁵⁶ Marlene Hunt Rikard, "An Experiment in Welfare Capitalism: The Health Care Services of the Tennessee Coal, Iron and Railroad Company" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alabama, 1983) 322.

⁵⁷ Melba Wilbanks Kizzine, "Beneath these Hills: Docena: The People, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow," Folder SC2549, Birmingham, Samford University, Davis Library Special Collections,

⁵⁸ Robert J. Norrell, "Labor Trouble: George Wallace and Union Politics in Alabama," in Robert Zieger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991); 255-256.

Federation of Teachers, the United Automobile Workers, United Steelworker's of America, and the Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers were effectively raided by the smaller unions intent on the preservation of southern autonomy and white-only membership.⁵⁹ As for Birmingham's Big Mules, the dispersion of the national unions and interracial coalition worked to their advantage as the city's race wage promised to remain intact.⁶⁰

Birmingham in the 1950s was a city in flux. Like many cities across the nation, Birmingham was deeply transformed in the post-war period. Families abandoned the countryside and crowded into Jones Valley en masse just as wealthier whites hurriedly moved 'over the mountain' to the shaded and quiet suburbs. Women, black and white, joined Birmingham's workforce in unprecedented numbers as their young flocked to the superficial rebellion of Elvis Presley and enjoyed the liberating power of the automobile. Birmingham's African-Americans, strengthened by the 1954 *Brown* decision, initiated organized campaigns to challenge the injustices of Jim Crow on every level, from integrated dressing rooms to integrated neighborhoods. Birmingham's men, like many throughout America's industrial cities, faced insecurity in the workplace on account of the sweeping mechanization of both mine and mill and the labor disorder which followed

⁵⁹ Norrell, "Labor Trouble," 255-256.

⁶⁰ In metropolitan Birmingham, the division of labor and wages relegated many African Americans to unskilled work and low wages. In 1950, the annual income for whites was \$2,274 compared to \$1,087 for blacks.⁶⁰ Race and gender provided tiers upon which Birmingham's residents were slotted: black women who worked as domestics in the city and over the mountain made their living at the bottom of the income ladder in 1950, bringing home an average of \$538 a year. Unskilled, or mainly black labor, pulled in an average of \$1,725 annually. Those who worked as domestics and unskilled laborers lived in impoverished conditions. In 1960, Jefferson County officials found that nearly 70,000 Birmingham residents were malnourished.⁶⁰ The semiskilled labor class comprised both of blacks and whites made \$2,203 a year with black professionals making slightly more and white professionals topping the ladder with an average annual income of \$4,000.⁶⁰ In many of the jobs in Birmingham's mines and mills, white and black men worked alongside one another, most notably in the semi-skilled sector of industry. With the introduction of mechanized mining in Birmingham in the 1950s, unskilled and semi-skilled job security became tenuous.

the merger of the AFL and CIO.⁶¹ In an era that witnessed growing autonomy for women and young people, Birmingham's men were forced to contemplate their shrinking power in the home, as well as, in the workplace.

“It was in their Blood”: From Biological Inferiority to Cultural Inferiority

Sex has always been integral to southern constructions of race and class. In her recollections of life in Birmingham, Alabama, Virginia Foster Durr recounted how her mother made clear the differences between nice, white southerners and poor, white trash. Whereas Virginia's mother, Mrs. Ann Foster described the middle and upper classes of whites by their neighborhood, their economic level, and by their brand of Protestantism, (such as “the nice people who lived on Southside were Episcopalians or Presbyterians, lived in nice houses and had servants”). Durr's mother identified the poorest whites by their yellow pallor, their manners, their infections such as hook worm and pellagra as well as their tendency to “breed like rabbits.” As for Birmingham's blacks, who according to Virginia Durr, “were outside of everything,” white southerners held deep-seated suspicions that most blacks (meaning the ones that whites didn't know personally) were afflicted with venereal diseases. This was the basis, Durr reasoned, for segregation. Whites could not drink from their water fountains, share their bathrooms, “sit beside them, (or) eat with them because they were offensive, smelled bad, and were diseased.” It was just “in their blood.” Sexually transmitted diseases and

⁶¹For a discussion of Birmingham's changing workforce, see *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 30 July 1952. For a discussion of larger trends with the 1950s youth culture see Ian Chambers, “A Strategy for Living,” 156-158. In 1956, the *Birmingham News* reported that the Jefferson County juvenile delinquency rates had increased by 14.3 percent between 1948 and 1954, 12 April 1956. Citizens regularly complained about the increase in juvenile delinquency. “Letter to Morgan from Arlene Bell,” 30 September 1955, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 18, File 36, BPLAD. Commission of the City of Birmingham Investigation into Connor's Police Department, listed as a flawed in the “prevention of juvenile delinquency,” 8 February 1962, Morgan Papers, Collection 266, Box 22, Files 2, 3, BPLAD.

hyperactive sexual lives, then, were the provenance of Birmingham's blacks and poor whites.⁶² But while Durr's account is reflective of the city in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s and her phrase it was "in their blood" points toward contemporary ideas of racial essentialism, her depictions of white ideas about the moral inferiority of blacks in Birmingham were also evident in the political culture of the 1950s and early 1960s.

Hitler's demise, alongside the horror wrought by Nazi Germany's belief in a master race, forever jettisoned the science of eugenics from wide social acceptance, even in the South.⁶³ White southerners relinquished their faith in the biological superiority of their race over the course of the first half of the twentieth century, replacing it with an equally strong belief in the cultural and moral superiority of most whites over most blacks. To sustain this assertion in the 1950s, Birmingham segregationists made public increased rates of crime, venereal diseases, and illegitimacy among southern blacks to validate claims of moral inferiority and pointed to behavioral differences, contrasting the staid nature of white worship to "raucous" church services in the black community to argue that racial differences could be evidenced by cultural divergence. Integration, according to men such as Hugh Locke Sr., promised to degrade the moral and cultural underpinnings the white South. Locke's American

⁶² This paradigm is explored in great detail among colonial historians including: Ann Laura Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties : The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies," *The Journal of American History* (2001): 829-865; Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*, (Berkeley: University of California, 2002). Virginia Foster Durr and Hollinger F. Barnard. *Outside the Magic Circle: the Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama, 1985), 254. In the first chapter of her autobiography, Durr explains how her mother organized and explained Birmingham's white social hierarchy.

⁶³ While this is the popular narrative, Alexandra Minna Stern challenges it to argue that the American belief in eugenics was repackaged and practiced until the 1960s, see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). Still, the discourse in Birmingham turned away from arguing for the biological inferiority of blacks toward the argument that the moral and cultural underpinnings of the black community in the South were more Victorian than their white counterparts.

States' Rights Party circulated a memorandum to its members quoting Carl Jung to support this claim, "The psychological peculiarities of the Americans evince features which are accessible to psychoanalytic investigations. These features point to energetic social repressions. The causes for the repressions can be found in the specific complex, namely, in the living together with lower races, especially with Negroes. Americans living together with barbaric races," according to the pamphlet, exerted "a suggestive effect on the laboriously tamed instinct of the white race and tends to pull it down."⁶⁴ Sexual and cultural practices, over mere biology, became the signifiers of race difference within the discourse of Massive Resistance. Although the largely uncritical acceptance of the belief in the moral superiority of whites expressed itself in a myriad of ways across the South, this conviction shrouded segregation behind the rhetoric of decency and Christian uprightness in Birmingham. But race as practice also made the meanings of racial difference tenuous, an effect that caused whites to guard their privilege and their progeny ever more closely.

In response to the expulsion of the NAACP in Alabama, along with the fevered organization of local whites, Birmingham civil rights leader Fred Shuttlesworth, Reverend N.H. Smith Jr., Reverend T.L. Lane, Reverend G.B. Pruitt, and Reverend R.L. Alford created the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) on June 3, 1956. After announcing a rally for organization through the papers and radio, over a thousand black men and women joined the reverends at Alford's Sardis Baptist church.⁶⁵ On June 5, 1956, Reverend Shuttlesworth, along with thousands of

⁶⁴ "Memoranda to Members," 14 April 1955, ASRA Papers, Collection 410, Box 1, File 7, BPLAD. The quote was taken from a speech given by Carl Jung in Nuremburg.

⁶⁵ Thornton, *Dividing Lines*, 197.

Birmingham's citizens, inaugurated what was to become the hardest fought freedom struggle in the nation.⁶⁶ Shuttlesworth, the new leader, called to the cheering crowd, "Our citizens are restive under the dismal yoke of segregation . . . this is no time for Uncle Toms."⁶⁷

Shuttlesworth galvanized African Americans across Birmingham through direct and indirect appeals to black manhood. The place and import of black masculinity during the struggle for civil rights has gained scholarly attention recently. Steve Estes, Timothy Tyson, and Danielle McGuire have examined the centrality of black masculinity to the civil rights movement.⁶⁸ In their own way, each has looked at the ways in which masculinity functioned as a tool of redemption for black men and the larger black community throughout the Freedom Struggle. The rallying cry for an aggressive and committed African-American male did not go unnoticed by southern whites. If manhood was central to the Movement, so, too, was it fundamental to the backlash. Southern, white men's identity depended upon the subservience of their children, women, and black men. In the 1950s, direct challenges from each these groups forced white men to fight for and justify their power.

⁶⁶ "Statement to Civil Rights Commission," 1, Shuttlesworth's Collection, Box 3, Folder 12, Martin Luther King Center. According to Reverend Shuttlesworth's statement to the Civil Rights Commission in the Spring of 1961, three-thousand people attended the first meeting of ACMHR.

⁶⁷ *Birmingham News*, 6 June 1956.

⁶⁸ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999).

Physical Space and Physical Bodies

Although the ACMHR and the larger black community battled for justice on many fronts, the major campaigns for racial integration between 1956 and 1961 concerned neighborhoods, schools, and public parks. At every turn, Birmingham's activists were met with organized, violent, and massive resistance. Far different from the public debates between whites that took place regarding integration in sports and the Birmingham police force, the years between 1956 and 1961 in Birmingham witnessed the advent of public consensus among whites regarding racial segregation and the brutality admissible for its preservation. Although reasons underpinning the need for racial segregation were many, the public discourse within the city largely revolved around the gendered notion of territory, that of both physical land and physical bodies. Throughout, the ideas of space and bodies fused together and Birmingham's whites were never able to think or talk about one without the other. Jim Crow and white resistance to its destruction was not primarily about southern sovereignty or even tradition; it was about white, male privilege in public and in the bedroom. "Sex lay at the heart of Jim Crow," Jane Dailey asserts unequivocally, "sexual control was central to both the ideology and practice of white supremacy."⁶⁹ In Birmingham, the fear of interracial sex became explicit in the fight for school, residential, and social segregation. With the 1954 Supreme Court decision, southern white manhood fell under attack. Regarding *Brown*, Alabama State Senator Walter C. Givhan laid plain white anxiety, "What is the real purpose of this? To open the bedroom doors of our white women to

⁶⁹ Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown," 119-144.

Negro men.”⁷⁰ This section takes four incidences of resistance: a castration, an attack at a music concert, a string of home bombings, and a church meeting to demonstrate the centrality of masculine anxiety in Birmingham’s backlash. In each case, the power of man as husband and father is employed as a justification to maim, attack, and degrade.

In the summer of 1957, Shuttlesworth announced that his children would attend the all-white Phillips High School during the upcoming school year. On September 2, one week before the first day of school, six officers of the East Lake Klan in Birmingham met to decide who would be the Captain of the Lair, second only to the Exalted Cyclops. Five of the officers listened as Bart Floyd made his pitch for Captain. Sitting in their lair, a small, cement building with kerosene lamps, dirt floors and windows with blackout curtains, Floyd told the others that he was ready “to prove himself worthy” by getting “nigger blood on his hands.”⁷¹

Rather than taking him at his word, the six jumped into two cars and went hunting for a victim as well as for Floyd’s credentials as captain. After stopping at a drugstore for razor blades and a bottle of turpentine, the six headed to Zion City, a poor, black neighborhood to select a “Negro to scare the hell out of.” When they came upon an African-American couple talking outside of a home, a few of the Klan members jumped out of their car and grabbed the thin man and forced him in the backseat of the car and drove back to the lair. On the way, Floyd pistol-whipped the man, Edward Aaron, and

⁷⁰ Walter C. Givhan quoted in Dailey, “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” 129.

⁷¹ William Bradford Huie, “A Ritual Cutting by the Ku Klux Klan,” *True*, 1964; “Two Klansmen Confess Emasculating Negro Picked at Random to Scare,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 8 September 1957. The five officers present were: Grover McCullough, William Miller, Jesse Mabry, John Griffin, and Joe Pritchett, the Exalted Cyclops.

upon arrival at their small lair, told him to “make like a dog” and clutched him by his neck as he forced him to crawl into the dark room.⁷²

Once the kerosene lamps were lit, the Klansmen put on their hoods and stood over their victim. Exalted Cyclops Pritchett told the man to give Reverend Shuttlesworth a message. “I want you to tell him to stop sending nigger children and white children to school together or we’re gonna do to him like we’re fixing to do to you.”⁷³ The men knocked their victim to the ground and pinned him to the dirt while Floyd knelt down and sliced off the man’s scrotum. Floyd then poured turpentine on the wound to intensify the pain of the mutilation. After passing the scrotum around, the group agreed that Bart Floyd was now worthy to become Captain of the Lair. Pritchett claimed it and kept it as a keepsake of the night’s violence. The Klansmen gathered up their victim and threw him into the trunk of one of the cars and drove him to Tarrant-Huffman highway where they left him for dead.⁷⁴

The nefarious crime of castration has a long history in the South. Usually employed to symbolize the sexual impotence of an African-American lynch victim accused of rape.⁷⁵ In the case of Edward Aaron’s castration, there was never an accusation of rape. Just before cutting him, the six Klansmen shouted questions at

⁷² Robert Corley, “The Quest for Racial Harmony, Race Relations in Birmingham, Alabama, 1947-1963” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Virginia, 1979), 135-138.

⁷³ William Bradford Huie, “A Ritual Cutting by the Ku Klux Klan,” *True*, 1964.

⁷⁴ “Two Klansmen Confess Emasculating Negro Picked at Random to Scare,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 8 September 1957. The victim, Edward Judge Aaron, lived due to the cauterizing effect of the turpentine. Aaron, a “feeble-minded,” part-time painter was spotted shortly after the Klansmen dropped him onto the side of the road. The motorist who saw him called the Birmingham police who picked Aaron up and took him to the hospital. Confessions and trials ensued. Two of the men, Miller and Griffin, turned state evidence for suspended sentences. Mabry, Floyd, Pritchett, and McCullough each stood trial, were found guilty of mayhem, each was sentenced the maximum penalty of twenty years. They were all free by 1965.

⁷⁵ Robyn Wiegman, “The Anatomy of a Lynching,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, No. 3, Special Issue: African American Culture and Sexuality (January 1993): 445-467.

Aaron: "You think you're as good as I am? You think any nigger is as good as a white man? You think nigger kids should go to school with white kids?"⁷⁶ Aaron's castration was to send a message to Shuttlesworth and all black men in Birmingham that their claims to manhood, in their quest to send their children to white schools, would provoke violence. However, just as in the cases where the victims were accused of sexually transgressing racial lines, Aaron's castration plainly reveals the intention of the Klan members to prove to themselves and others that white men still had the power to take black manhood.

In September of 1957, despite the Klan's warning, Reverend Shuttlesworth and his wife, Ruby, brought *Brown* to Birmingham. On the morning of September 9, Christian Movement vice-president Reverend J.S. Pfifer drove Reverend Shuttlesworth, his wife, their two daughters, Pat and Frederika, and two other young African-American men to all-white Phillips High School. When they pulled up to the school, they saw TV crews, about twenty white men, and a few police officers. Shuttlesworth stepped out of the car and was immediately attacked. In the following moments, the white men assaulted Shuttlesworth with brass knuckles, wooden clubs and chains. Most of the skin was scraped off of his face and ears. He heard men yell, "Let's kill him" and women cheer, "Kill the mother fucking nigger and it will all be over. Let's end it today. " They opened the door and lashed Reverend Pfifer with a chain and then reached into the car and stabbed Mrs. Shuttlesworth in the hip. After a few minutes, patrol cars and motor

⁷⁶ William Bradford Huie, "A Ritual Cutting by the Ku Klux Klan," *True*, 1964.

scooters arrived on the scene and Reverend Pfifer was able to drive through the crowd to escape the mob.⁷⁷

The responses of local city officials and the newspapers to these acts of horrific violence made it clear that the whites in Birmingham would stand united when faced with integration. Shuttlesworth was branded “a troublemaker” who “has courted this violence.”⁷⁸ In a typed statement to the city regarding Shuttlesworth’s attempt, Mayor James Morgan clarified the stand of the city government: “Negro agitators sought to create a condition of general disturbance at Phillips High School . . . the good citizens stood up and the guilty were punished – there is one thing that I am certain of – the good citizens of Birmingham do not want rabble rousers of either race to disturb the peaceful conditions of the city . . . each race has its time honored traditions and except for the few occasions on the part of the hot heads and rabble rousers nothing has occurred to unduly disturb our happy existence in this beautiful valley.”⁷⁹

The attack on Shuttlesworth and his family along with the public and official sanctioning of such acute violence is evidence of the perceived threat of racial integration. The fear at the time stemmed not from interracial classrooms, but from interracial relationships. In an interview, E.E., a Jefferson County White Citizens Council member confessed, “Intermarriage is primarily what I am afraid of in the future. Not worried about integration specifically, I am worried about what it would lead to.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Fred L. Shuttlesworth, “Birmingham Revisited,” *Ebony* 125, August 1971, 16.
Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001), 128-131.

⁷⁸ *Birmingham News*, 9 September 1957; *Montgomery Advertiser* 10 September 1957.

⁷⁹ “Statement” 12 September 1957, Morgan Papers, Collection Number 266, Box 19, File 5, BPLAD.

⁸⁰ Bruce West, interview with Edna Keiser, 23 April 1979, White Citizens’ Council Collection, WSHSC.

Another member, Jim Oakley, in recalling why he opposed school integration stated, “That’s the thing they feared then – if the races integrated that there possibly would be intermarrying and that their race would become nonexistent.”⁸¹ Whites across the south promulgated the notion that interracial sex necessarily followed school integration. In an article published in fall 1956 issue *The Southerner: News of the White Citizens Council*, “Ace” Carter wrote, “NO MAN, who calls himself a white man, can with clear conscience and any principle left within him, support such a program of degeneracy and racial, state, and national suicide.”⁸²

A “Soul Quaking Blow as the Utter Beast is Brought to the Surface”: Anxiety over White, Cultural Degeneracy

Integrated schools in Birmingham were not the only places where whites imagined and feared that contact between blacks and whites would lead to sex. Any space where the youth of both races socialized prompted anxiety among the white population. This became clear when black activists within the city began to pressure the municipal government to strike down ordinances, which upheld public park segregation. Locations in which young people mixed socially were deemed to be far more dangerous than those where the proposed mixed population would be older. Playgrounds, amusement parks, and especially swimming pools were off limits to race mixing. However, when the Bull Connor and the City Commission in 1961 vowed to shut down all municipal parks rather than let blacks enter, many whites in the city tried to work out limited integration to save spaces where adults, safely inculcated the ideology of white supremacy, socialized. White men across the city wrote to their municipal government

⁸¹ Jim Oakley, interview with Jane England, 10 May 1979, White Citizens’ Council Collection, WSHSC.

⁸² *The Southerner, News of the White Citizens’ Council*, Sept/Oct 1956, p. 14.

to oppose the closing of golf courses and museums, locations presumed to be safe for integration.

White interest in black music increased in March 1956 when Ace Carter attended a rock n' roll concert and departed disturbed, "The uninitiated listener feels a physical and soul quaking blow as the utter beast is brought to the surface."⁸³ In 1956, the North Alabama White Citizen's Council urged the churches in Birmingham "Speak Out Against these Anti-Christ Forces."⁸⁴ In the March issue of *The Southerner*, Asa Carter recounted the concert where he observed "frantic, screaming" white girls crowding around the black musicians to ask for autographs and pictures which they "clutched close to their breasts in a provocative and loving gesture."⁸⁵ The reactions of young, white women to "Negro music" and musicians, Carter asserted, threatened the "entire moral structure of man, of Christianity, of spirituality in Holy Marriage. . . and all that the white man has built through his devotion to God."⁸⁶ White men began to picket concerts of black musicians at the Birmingham Municipal Auditorium through the month of March holding signs that read: "Jungle Music Promotes Integration" and "B-Bop Promotes Communism."⁸⁷ White teenagers responded by joining the picket lines with their own signs, "Rock and Roll will never die" and "Rock and roll is Here to Stay!"⁸⁸ In the same month, the members of the Citizens' Council in nearby Anniston, Alabama

⁸³ *The Southerner*, March 1956, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Corley, "The Quest for Racial Harmony, Race Relations in Birmingham, Alabama, 1947-1963."

⁸⁵ *The Southerner*, March 1956, p. 6.

⁸⁶ *The Southerner*, March 1956, p. 6..

⁸⁷ *Birmingham News*, 11 April 1956.

⁸⁸ *Birmingham News*, 11 April 1956.

began a drive to ban “all rock ‘n’ roll and Negro music” from Alabama jukeboxes.⁸⁹

While much of the national obsession with juvenile delinquency in the 1950s centered on switch blades, vulgar language, and vandalism, the unconcealed sexuality of the working-class teenage male in stovepipe jeans, the ducktail hair-do, and a black leather jacket provoked near panic.⁹⁰ In Birmingham, the fear of undisciplined young bodies became amplified and ultimately overpowering after the Supreme Court ruled in favor of school integration in 1954. At the center of the dilemma was the extent to which the young had been culturally groomed and inculcated in the *mentalité* of white supremacy.

⁹¹ The older generation, ready to reassert their power, vowed to fill the streets with blood before they would hand over the mantle of maintaining racial purity to the rebellious young.⁹²

In an infamous incident in April 1956, Alabama native Nat King Cole came to Birmingham to perform as the headliner of a group of musicians at the Municipal Auditorium. Cole and three members in his otherwise all-white company were the only African-American performers of the night. Although the performers could be integrated, the audience remained segregated according to a city ordinance. Therefore, on April 10, two concerts were scheduled, one to be performed in front of a white audience of about 3,000 and one to be performed in front of a black audience of about the same size.

⁸⁹ *Christian Science Monitor*, 11 April 1956.

⁹⁰ Katie Mooney, “Ducktails, Flick-knives, and Pugnacity: Subcultural and Hegemonic Masculinities in South Africa, 1948-1960,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24, 753-774.

⁹¹ Ann Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies.” The idea of cultural grooming is discussed in Stoler’s article as she examines how colonial relationships are maintained through sexual distance.

⁹² “People in Motion” (Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights Pamphlet), 1966, 1, Shuttlesworth Papers, Martin Luther King Center.

In front of the white audience, Cole began his performance with “Autumn Leaves” despite a few calls from the audience to “go home nigger.”⁹³ When he began his second ballad, “Little Girl,” four white men ran down an aisle and attempted to launch themselves up onto the stage over the footlights. Three made it over and threw Cole to the ground. Cole struggled with his three assailants while the Ted Heath Orchestra, unsure of how to react to the violence on stage, began to play “God Save the Queen” as police officers dragged the three assailants off of Cole and the curtain fell. Cole was able to see a doctor and perform the second concert of the night in front of the black audience in Birmingham but then cancelled two upcoming shows to take care of his back.⁹⁴ The Birmingham police arrested six men in connection with the attack: Willie Richard Vinson, 23, E.L. Vinson, 25, Kenneth Adams, 35, *Southerner’s* Jesse Mabry, 43, Mike Fox, 37 and Orliss Clevenger, 18. Willie Vinson and Adams were charged with assault with intent to murder, Clevenger, Fox and E.L. Vinson were charged with conspiracy; Mabry faced charges of disorderly conduct. Petition drives began across the city to raise money for lawyers for Fox, Vinson, and Mabry who fought against “opening the door for the Negro race into what heretofore has been the most guarded sanctuary by our father . . . his children and motherhood.”⁹⁵

The frenzy surrounding popular youth culture in Birmingham reflected a deeper and more expansive anxiety. While only the most extreme segregationists advocated violence to rid the city of rock ‘n’ roll, seemingly all of Birmingham’s whites opposed

⁹³ *Chicago Daily Defender*, 11 April 1956,

⁹⁴ The best and most detailed account of the Cole Incident comes from Brian Ward’s “Civil Rights and Rock and Roll: Revisiting the Nat King Cole Attack of 1956” in the *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History* 24, Issue 2 April 2010; 21-24.

⁹⁵ *The Southerner*, October/September, 1956, 1.

racial integration in shared spaces between young whites and blacks. Schools, swimming pools, parks, and playgrounds in this era were imbued not only with political meaning as territories for whites to defend but they also carried sexual meaning in the white mind. The certainty of interracial sex following social integration has largely been documented but rarely interrogated.⁹⁶ Young men and women across the South, it was feared, had not yet been fully inculcated in the ways of the “Southland.” Rock n’ roll served as evidence that the racial and sexual prescriptions of their parent’s generation were endangered by their teen-aged children. In Birmingham throughout the 1950s, the fears concerning the preservation of white identity combined with anxieties over the loosening sexual and racial morality of the American teenager. The older generation of men, unsettled by the challenges of the post-war urban South, fused the problems of integration and teenage deviance to reassert their gender power. Avowing to protect his children and his race, the Birmingham man worked hard to discipline and control both.

Bombingham

Schools and parks, where young children interacted, were not the only contested public spaces in Birmingham. The fight against neighborhood integration became the most violent in the nation and what earned Birmingham its sobriquet, “Bombingham.” On September 20, 1963, John J. Drew, manager of the home insurance company Alex and Co, closed his home insurance operations in Birmingham. Alex and Co. had been the “largest carrier of Negro risks,” but “due to the unsettled condition in Birmingham” the agency could no longer assume the risks of insuring homes owned by the city’s

⁹⁶ The most comprehensive treatment is Dailey’s “Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown,” 119-144, 129.

black residents.⁹⁷ Between 1956 and 1962, whites bombed twenty African-American homes and local churches. The targeted homes fell within two racially changing neighborhoods: North Smithfield and Fountain Heights.

Since 1949, when federal courts struck down the segregation ordinances on Birmingham's books, African-American residents began to move into College Hills (what came to be known as Dynamite Hill) in North Smithfield and then, to Fountain Heights. The very first home of "the Negro woman who had won the lawsuit was torn by a dynamite blast days after the court decision."⁹⁸ Still, African-Americans continued to move into previously all-white neighborhoods. The changing complexion of Birmingham's neighborhoods became another attack on white manhood. In September 1956, Carter addressed the issue when he asked his readers how they would feel if "you were past 65 years of age, had worked all your life to get a home paid for, and were suddenly confronted with the fact that negroes were moving in next door to you? . . . Our enemies have declared themselves and let every white man who is concerned of his children take note of them and as they make their moves today in real estate; tomorrow even closer."⁹⁹

A few months later, in February of 1957, a group of Smithfield property owners went to the City Commission to request that the men "draw up a line to divide the white and Negro residents of the area." The spokesman for the delegation, J.L. Walker,

⁹⁷ Letter from John J. Drew to Burke Marshall, 20 September 1963, Burke Marshall Papers, Collection 256, Box 2, File 8, BPLAD.

⁹⁸ "Birmingham: Integration's Hottest Crucible," *Time Magazine*, 15, December 15 1958.

⁹⁹ *The Southerner*, September/October 1956, 16. In the May 1956 Issue, *The Southerner* published a story on racial integration in Detroit neighborhoods, "Negroes have moved into practically every neighborhood of the white workers in Detroit. Little White girls, playing on the sidewalks are subjected to the bullying and fondling of black boys." Racially motivated bombings discontinued from 1954 to April 26, 1956, when the home of a black dentist, Dr. Nixon, was bombed.

presented a petition signed by 500 residents. Walker asked that the City Commission take the petition to the Birmingham Real Estate Board to ask for its cooperation in the sale of houses in the area. Mayor James Morgan informed Walker that the city's segregation ordinances were under permanent injunction from Federal Courts and that stiff penalties are provided for violation, but Commissioner J.T. Waggoner and Commissioner Robert E. Lindbergh promised to "explore all possible routes" to aid the white property owners "in preservation of the character of their neighborhood."¹⁰⁰

In the fifteen months that followed, white supremacists bombed eleven homes in Smithfield and Fountain Heights without prosecution.¹⁰¹ Drive-by shootings and other forms of vandalism also characterized the experiences of black families who moved into sections of Birmingham that were thought to be "white territory."¹⁰² In a statement concerning the violence in his city, the newly reelected Commissioner Connor bragged, "Damn the law. Down here we make our own law."¹⁰³ Birmingham's course toward extremism was not lost on anyone. A visiting reporter from the *New York Times*, Harrison Salisbury wrote of the city "every inch of the middle ground has been fragmented by the emotional dynamite of racism . . . the distinction between state power and mob power is being eroded."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ "College Hill Residents Ask Negro-White Dividing Line," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 12 February 1957.

¹⁰¹ It was not until an attempted bombing on July 17, 1957 when three Klan members attempt to bomb a Fountain Heights home. The residents chased them and beat them. Herbert E. Wilcutt, Ellis Lee, and Cranford Neal escaped but then went to the Emergency Room for wounds and the police arrested them.

¹⁰² Glennon Threat, interview with Kimberly Hill, 16 June 2005, Southern Oral History Program at University of North Carolina, <http://sohp.unc.edu/>. Threat's family was one of the first to move into College Hills in North Smithfield.

¹⁰³ "Report on the Federal Court Hearing in 1960," *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 23 November 1960.

¹⁰⁴ Harrison Salisbury, "Fear and Hatred Grip Birmingham," *New York Times*, 12 April 1960.

Cultural Cleanliness: Highlands United Methodist Men

The fight for segregation exemplified by Carter, the Klan, the Citizen's Council, and the Smithfield property owners took place higher up Red Mountain, as well. Many vocal well-to-do segregationists could be found every Sunday morning at Highlands Methodist, a beautiful, Spanish Baroque sanctuary in the richest corner of town which historian Glenn Eskew referred to as "the clearinghouse of Methodist massive resistance." Based out of Highlands, a group of Methodist advocates for segregation in Birmingham, The Methodist Laymen's Union (MLU), employed the rhetoric of superior sexual morality and the role of the father to protect his children in their propaganda to cajole whites to resist integration.

The MLU brought together the wealthiest and most powerful men in Birmingham. In 1959, the Union held a meeting at Highlands Methodist Church to outline the perils of integration. On March 19, over 1800 white Alabamians crowded into the handsome sanctuary to listen to the message of the newly formed segregationist group. Although the national policy of the Methodist Church stated "that there must be no place in the Methodist Church for racial discrimination or enforced segregation," southern churches were under the direction of southern bishops and, therefore, could remain segregated. However, the 1960 Methodist Conference threatened to reorganize the church to make elections of church leaders national rather than by jurisdiction, a move that would result in southern churches under the thumb of northern bishops, a sure recipe for integration. The spring meeting at Highlands Methodist served to organize Alabama's Methodist laymen in a concentrated campaign to oppose the threat of integration. The previous year, in 1958, the church played host to lieutenant-governor Albert Boutwell on his tour to rally support for the Pupil Placement Act to duck school integration. On the evening

of March 19, the leaders of the Methodist Laymen's Union faced the gathered throng in the overcrowded sanctuary. The committee chairmen of the Union included Birmingham's most powerful men, Richard Stockham and Perry Tarrant, two major industrialists, state legislator Lawrence Dumas, and soon-to-be City Councilmember M.E. Wiggins. Powder blue pamphlets labeled "A Pronouncement" went out among the crowd while the newly elected President of the Methodist Laymen's Union, Birmingham Circuit Judge Whit Windham, discussed the perils inherent in the practical application of an integrated church in Alabama including "youth socials at various homes, marriage ceremonies, hikes and swimming meets, and various parties at private homes."¹⁰⁵

At issue, according to both Windham and "The Pronouncement," was the moral fitness of Alabama's blacks. While the Methodist Laymen's Union insisted that they held no hatred for blacks, Union leaders told Birmingham's upper echelon that segregation was the only way to keep their children safe and "clean." "The most exalted impulse of man," according to the Pronouncement, was "to assure the dignity, the integrity, and the progress of his family and his descendents." To demarcate the "dignity" of whiteness, Windham reviewed elevated levels of illegitimacy and venereal diseases in the black community and then asked their audience and readers if "parents are mistaken when they attempt to select moral and clean companions for their children?" They warned that planned inclusiveness would result in the "transfusion of racial and social morals" and "dilute the pure strain" of whiteness and "conceal and bury the malignancy" of

¹⁰⁵ "A Pronouncement" Methodist Laymen's Union, 12 February 1959, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 8, File 1, BPLAD.

blackness.¹⁰⁶ Segregationists in the 1950s appropriated the language and intentions of biological difference expressed by Durr's mother to newer distinctions of black and white culture - ideas which nevertheless supported ideas about the moral inferiority of black southerners.

Conclusion

Integration in parks, concerts halls, schools, pools, and churches elicited acute reactions from the white community because these spaces were the realm of the young.¹⁰⁷ Whites in Birmingham conflated disciplining young bodies with the policing of racial borders in the name of protecting young, white women and ultimately the purity of the race. White women, therefore, stood as the symbols of racial power while white men remained in possession of both racial and gender power. Birmingham, after *Brown*, was "a city in fear" as Harrison Salisbury reported in 1960.¹⁰⁸ The social, political and cultural landscape of the city was transformed in the previous decade. Rural Alabamians moved into the urban core, women went farther in school than their male counterparts and joined the workforce in record numbers, young men and women rebelled against the traditions and mores of their parents and job security for many men grew tenuous with the dispersal of the national labor organizations and the mechanization of the mines. After *Brown*, the fight for segregation became the salve for what was ailing Birmingham's white men. Through the white resistance, white men

¹⁰⁶ These ideas circulated outside of Highlands Methodist. In 1962, a citizen in Birmingham advocated the forced sterilization of black women and "no-questions-asked abortions" policy as a means to avoid integration and preserve the prestige of white skin, Letter to Commissioner Hanes from anonymous, 16 December 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 1, File 38, BPLAD.

¹⁰⁷ Stuart Hall, "Rituals of Resistance," 55.

¹⁰⁸ Stuart Hall, "Rituals of Resistance," 55.

were able to insulate their roles as workers, as protective husbands and fathers, and as southern men by asserting themselves atop an artificial hierarchy. As many working men could no longer claim the role of patriarch, they turned to massive resistance. The men of the South, according to Asa Carter, would “set their jaw against iron might and tyranny” and “remain faithful to the Southland for the future” of their children.¹⁰⁹ As the tumult of the post-war era dislocated southern manhood; Massive Resistance grounded and redefined the obligations the white, southern man.

¹⁰⁹ Transcript from Asa Carter’s radio show, “The History you and I are Making” on 21 February 1955. American States’ Rights Association Papers, Collection 416, Box 1, Files 1-29, BPLAD.

CHAPTER 4

“WHO SPEAKS FOR BIRMINGHAM”

In January of 1958, the Southern Institute of Management (SIM), an auditing company based out of Louisville, Kentucky, announced before Birmingham’s Rotary Club that Jefferson County would be the site of a metropolitan audit. Sponsored by Chamber of Commerce members Sidney Smyer, Joseph Johnston, and James Head, the audit promised to diagnose Birmingham’s failings in order to create a better, more prosperous community; it was to be, according to SIM, a “psycho-analysis” of the city. Birmingham’s businesses raised \$30,000 for the project, which lasted from July 1958 to August 1959. The research was exhaustive. The Southern Institute of Management gave each of Birmingham’s political, financial, and religious leaders, along with 30,000 high school and professional school students, a questionnaire specifically designed to document an overall personality profile of the city. The researchers conducted interviews and compiled biographies for 126 of Birmingham’s leaders, examined the present state and future plans for 164 business firms, and researched the histories of 167 organized groups in the city.¹

In 1960, SIM published a preliminary report on their findings. The results proved disheartening: “Birmingham exhibits a full quota of discontent but a minimum of aspiration.”² All segments of society, including high school and college-aged citizens, felt uninspired. Distrust and inaction typified city residents, including the intellectuals, the artists, the civic leaders, and the students.³ Birmingham seemed plagued by “an

¹ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, (Louisville: Southern Institute of Management, 1960), Report 1, 5.

² *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, Report 1, 18.

³ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, Report 1, 7.

overall malaise,” the report concluded, but the citizens of the steel city were not dispassionate about all things. Fear and uncertainty animated the people and politics across Jones Valley, feelings which were manifest in an abiding faith and strict adherence to conventional social values. The auditors found a population “conservative to the point of reaction” in terms of family structures, gender and race relations, social customs, religious piety, and local politics. Accounts of private life, marriage and divorce records, church attendance, public social standards, and overall decorum revealed a “strong moral awareness, almost compunction” and a pervasive “concern with absolute moral standards and definitions.”⁴ Birmingham’s residents brought with them from the countryside not only a deeply embedded and admirable work ethic but also the fire and brimstone of the Southern Baptist God.⁵

Those who analyzed the results hypothesized that Birmingham’s unique blend of xenophobia along with its preoccupation with internal matters such as religiosity and morality became intensified by its economic structures. “Much of Birmingham’s prosperity or depression was linked to images of absentee owners or finance managers, instilling a sense of local non-participation and apprehension.”⁶ As Charles Morgan phrased it, the people in Birmingham felt as though “they played second-string short-stop on a third-rate farm club for some pirates from Pittsburgh.”⁷ The researchers concluded that the strict racial hierarchy and zealous devotion to Christian conservatism

⁴ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, Report 1, 12.

⁵ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, Report 1, 12; Birmingham is a city in which Biblical quotation and public exhibitions of religious practice have not gone out of style.”

⁶ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, Report 1, 16.

⁷ “Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement,” Pacifica Radio, <http://www.crmvet.org/info/bham63.htm>, accessed 4 October 2010.

were among the few aspects of life in Birmingham under local white control.⁸ The poverty and resentment rooted in the colonial economy of the city, the audit warned, threatened to strangle Birmingham's future; the people of the city "destroy more readily than they build," and the local economy could not endure the city's destructive tendencies.⁹

The audit proved prophetic. By the beginning of the 1960s, Birmingham's economy was beginning to buckle. Between 1958 and 1961, the city lost ten percent of its jobs and business expansion grew sluggish.¹⁰ Hard economic times had settled in the city.¹¹ When the Movement and backlash in Birmingham attracted national attention, the defensive nature of local residents came to the fore in the place that Martin Luther King Jr. called the "belly of the beast." Between 1961 and 1963, white Birmingham's preoccupation with southern white manhood continued to betray insecurity in the face of the local black freedom struggle, a movement for "equality in manhood."¹² Violence, park closures, and the ever-ambitious white, male supremacist rhetoric punctuated the early 1960s in Birmingham. But behind Bull Connor and the many photographs and stories of racial intransigence between 1961 and 1963, wealthier whites had begun to construct an alternate response to the Movement, one which would deeply affect the historical positioning of themselves and their poorer counterparts.

⁸ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit: preliminary report, 1960*, Report 3, 16.

⁹ *The Birmingham metropolitan audit : preliminary report, 1960*, Report 4, 28.

¹⁰ Joe David Brown, "A City in Fear," *Saturday Evening Post*, 2 March 1963, 17.

¹¹ "Downtowners Alarmed," *Birmingham News*, 19 March 1961, 1.

¹² Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 164

Departing from the consensus around the primacy of segregation that characterized the white community in the 1950s, the beginning of the 1960s witnessed the emergence of a new type of class consciousness in Birmingham, one packaged and processed by a public relations firm to sell the image of the middle-class, moderate man to national corporations. This chapter explores how class became a political plaything for politicians like Bull Connor and businessmen like Sydney Smyer, men who wanted to exploit rather than negotiate the gap between the rich and the poor between 1961 and the beginning of 1963. From this contest, a new image was born, one which separated white businessmen from the disgrace of Birmingham's backlash. A prominent historian of Birmingham's civil rights movement, Glenn Eskew, discusses these years in terms of the importance of the "businessmen's reform" which resulted in the ousting of Connor and the commission form of government.¹³ While Eskew carefully recounts the transition from 1961-1963 in the city, his treatment focuses on the most visible proponents of change, the business class. This, I argue, reinforces the oversimplified understanding of southern racism as something which could be and was encased within a certain strata of society. Vocal segregationists, coupled with claims of white-collar reform, have veiled the degree to which working-class men and women abandoned absolute segregation. When blue-collar families witnessed the closing of all public parks in 1962 and listened as public officials and neighborhood organizations rallied to shut down Birmingham's public schools, men and women in Jones Valley began to defect from absolute segregation. By charting the political moves of the wealthy businessmen and lawyers in Birmingham alongside the politics of its workers, this chapter

¹³ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, Chapter 5.

demonstrates that businessmen effectuated their reform through the compliance and political support of the city's regular people. In addition, I argue that the gentlemanly image of the white-collar moderate, a calculated construction, simultaneously cloaked the racial advantages which money preserved for those who professed moderation and made scapegoats out of Birmingham's blue-collared men. This chapter highlights the rupture between southern, white men both within and between classes and demonstrates that gender, specifically masculinity, a source of cohesion in the 1950s, fueled social fragmentation by the beginning of the 1960s.

In recounting the narrative of Birmingham during this time period, historians have focused on three groups: vocal white segregationists (including the city commission), Fred Shuttlesworth's Alabama Council for Human Relations (ACMHR) along with other black activists, and mostly young, white business leaders who began to push for a middle ground in 1961. Comprised of men who lived over the mountain but worked in the city, this third group has garnered all of the scholarly attention given to white moderates during the civil rights movement era in Birmingham. Associations such as the Citizens for Progress (CFP) and the Young Men's Business Club (YMBC) have been the primary focus for scholarly examinations into the moderating forces in Birmingham because they were integral to the changing politics within the city.¹⁴ The existence of an organized, politically effective, and racially moderate, middle class was

¹⁴ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*; Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971); Michael Klarman, "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis," *Journal of American History* 81 (1994): 81-118; Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism and the Transformation of American Politics*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Glenn Feldman and Patricia Sullivan, *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South*, (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2004); J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines*; William A. Nunnely, *Bull Connor*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

new in Birmingham, but full integration and social equality were not fundamental to the middle-class ideology. With very few exceptions, Birmingham's moderate men advocated interracial communication and token integration on behalf of the bottom line. Business leaders believed that the closed parks and brutality for which Birmingham was fast becoming famous would have a dwindling effect on local industries and keep prospective businesses out of the city, noting that "adequate recreational facilities go hand in hand with industrial growth."¹⁵ Suburban businessmen organized the campaign to finally rid Birmingham of the city commission form of government and its most notorious commissioner, Bull Connor. Consequently, it has been this segment of society studied and credited with the emergent disjuncture in white attitudes concerning segregation. However, the white, working class within Birmingham are consistently overlooked in the historiography of this time period, subsumed under the category of rabid segregationists. Among Birmingham's working-class men, the fringe has always spoken for the whole.

"We Can't Take this Anymore": Freedom Riders and Business Moderation

In May of 1961, Sydney Smyer Sr., the incoming chairman of the Chamber of Commerce flew to Tokyo along with a small group of local businessmen to represent Birmingham at an International Rotary convention. On May 15, in the company of the world's top businessmen, Smyer and his group woke to find their city on the front pages of the Tokyo newspapers. The international newswire transmitted pictures and stories of the previous day, Mother's Day, May 14, as the Freedom Riders disembarked in Birmingham's Trailways bus terminal. To test the 1960 Supreme Court decision in

¹⁵ "Basic Work for COC in 1963" Hanes Papers, Collection 266, Box 9, File 41, BPLAD.

Boynton v. Virginia, which outlawed segregation in interstate bus and rail stations, a small group of civil rights activists boarded interstate buses in the late spring of 1961 and rode along a planned route from Washington D.C. through the South. The volunteer students from Congress for Racial Equality (CORE) travelled safely from the Washington to Charlotte, but met resistance upon entering the Deep South. Outside of Birmingham, in Anniston, Alabama, white supremacists firebombed one of the public busses carrying the volunteers; when the riders came into Birmingham, about ten Klansmen waited for the young group to walk off of the bus. Armed with lead pipes, chains, baseball bats and a guaranteed fifteen minute window to do as they please without police interference, Birmingham's Klansmen beat the arriving Riders while Thomas Langston, a photographer from the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, captured on film the barbarity of the white mob, as well as the satisfied expressions of the onlookers. Langston himself was attacked, but his photographs survived to exhibit Birmingham's hatred around the world. In Tokyo, Smyer declared, "We can't take this anymore."¹⁶

Born in Cherokee County, Alabama in 1897 and raised in Birmingham, Sidney Smyer grew up working on his father's dairy farm, selling groceries and working in the steel mills to earn his way through college. After receiving his law degree from the University of Alabama and serving in World War I, Smyer returned to Birmingham to begin his career as an attorney. Over the next fifty years, his unswerving focus on the bottom line influenced the physical, economic, and political development of his

16 David Vann, interview, 2 February 1995, BCRI. The accounts of the arrival of the Freedom Riders comes from the Raymond Arsenault's book, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and The Struggle for Racial Justice* and from David Vann's oral history once Mayor, Vann went back and listened to the police tapes which called for help in the station. In addition, Gary Thomas Rowe, an FBI informant for the Klan, when interviewed, reported that Chief of Police Jamie Moore promised the Klan a window of time to have their way with the Riders.

hometown. Along with his brothers and uncles, Smyer built a stately residence along the crest of Red Mountain. The Smyer family interwove white supremacy into their religious and political practices alongside other Big Mules who lived above the city. Smyer's uncles chartered Highlands Methodist Church, the meeting place of Birmingham's upper-echelon's resistance during the 1950s. Sidney Smyer entered politics in 1934 when he was elected to Alabama's House of Representatives, where he consistently supported Governor Frank Dixon and the big mule/black belt coalition. In 1935, Smyer was appointed as counsel to the Board of Directors of Birmingham's Realty Company, which owned almost the entire downtown. In 1942, he was elected vice president, president in 1953 and became the chairman of the board of this powerful company in 1967. To extend his power from realty to the service industry, Smyer chartered the Jefferson County Planning Commission in 1947. By the early 1960s, he held sway over the economic affairs of the city and his future was bound to that of Birmingham's, a city in disgrace on the morning papers in Tokyo in 1961.¹⁷

Just four days after the Freedom Riders arrived in Birmingham, CBS reporter Howard K. Smith interviewed the men and women of Birmingham in a one-hour special entitled, "Who Speaks for Birmingham?"¹⁸ The broadcast documented both white and black sentiments across the city. CBS and Smith wanted to "report on the mood of Birmingham by letting some of the people of the community speak of and for their city" because of the hotly contested *New York Times* article by journalist Harrison Salisbury which referred to the city as one "gripped by fear and hatred."¹⁹ Throughout "Who

17 Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them"; Eskew, But for Birmingham; McWhorter, Carry Me Home.

18 "Who Speaks For Birmingham," 2, CBS, BPLAD.

19 "Who Speaks For Birmingham," 3.

Speaks for Birmingham,” Smith caught Birmingham’s residents right before the walls of Jim Crow began to give, before the closed parks, the dogs and fire hoses, before the Sixteenth Street Church bombing. This was a moment in which both the segregationist and integrationist vision for the South remained possible. Although Bull Connor declined to meet with CBS, many white men and women took advantage of the opportunity to explain race in Birmingham to America, a nation very much interested since the photographs of the Freedom Riders in the Trailways terminal.

The program aired on Thursday, May 18, 1961. Smith and producer David Lowe’s format was simple. They traveled around Birmingham interviewing a range of its citizens about the city’s racial climate. Among the many whites interviewed, most of the women and all of the men bristled at the prospect of racial integration. Although their stations in life were vastly different, the white men interviewed defended the white supremacist South. John Temple Graves, the editor of the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, acknowledged that Birmingham was “guilty of all sorts of sins” but he made sure to mention that Birmingham was “no more guilty than the rest of the nation.”²⁰ Graves argued that the South was the nation’s punching bag: “If a murder happens in Chicago, it was reported just as a murder,” relayed Graves. However, if it occurred in Birmingham, the national response was, “Oh, that’s the bloody, violent South.”²¹ Referring directly to Salisbury’s *Times* assertion that there was a “reign of terror” in Birmingham; Graves argued that there was no such thing.²² Attorney and white supremacist Hugh Locke argued similarly

²⁰ “Who Speaks For Birmingham,” 4.

²¹ “Who Speaks For Birmingham,” 4.

²² “Who Speaks For Birmingham,” 5.

that the “racial unrest in Birmingham is resting largely in the minds of people outside of Birmingham.” It was, according to the ASRA founder, a myth.

Those in Birmingham who maintained that the North exaggerated the region’s penchant for violence argued alongside local residents who suggested that desegregation should not progress lest the poor men of the region commit terrible violence. In his famous study of the South, *The Southern Heritage*, James McBride Dabbs argued that middle- and upper-class whites employed this argument to duck responsibility for the region’s terrible race relations and to prompt violence. “It is a fact that the present opposition to desegregation often comes from well-placed, secure white people” who claim to have “no great objection” to integration but “the poorer whites wouldn’t stand for it . . . there would be violence.” According to Dabbs, southern leaders made sure to announce this threat publicly; “they have written the lines for violence and could write other ones if they wished.”²³ In Birmingham, many of CBS’s interviewees provided this rationale. Colonel William S. Pritchard, a Birmingham lawyer, told Smith, “I have no doubt that the Negro basically knows that the best friend he’s ever had is the Southern, white man,” but school integration would never take place in the city, “there would be a measure of violence in Birmingham.”²⁴ Consistently, white residents failed to confront the issue of racial equality. Instead, ire toward the North, faith in the deterring power of white violence, and widespread ignorance regarding the resolve of the local black community characterized Smith’s interviewees. In the days and months to come, Birmingham’s white community could no longer blame the North for their

²³ Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 112-114.

²⁴ “Who Speaks For Birmingham,” 10.

problems nor claim ignorance pertaining to the will and determination of the local African-American community.

The Klan attacks on the Freedom Riders in Birmingham affected the city in two important ways. Among blacks, the rides sparked greater interest in the Movement. The news coverage demonstrated that the rest of the nation was watching the South, even if the local whites appeared to be unmoved.²⁵ For white businessmen, the brutality of their citizens and the suspected cooperation of their police force created a dark national image with which they knew that they would have to contend if they wanted to keep making money in Birmingham. Both David Vann, later mayor of Birmingham, and Sydney Smyer, believed that Birmingham's middle-class moderation began as a response to the national outrage following the violence in the Trailways terminal on Mother's Day.²⁶ Publicly, however, Birmingham's whites did not oppose the actions of the Klan. Instead, locals blamed the melee on outside agitators and the resentment towards the federal government boiled over to push two avowed segregationists ahead in the race for the City Commission.

"Keep Birmingham White"

In Birmingham's short history, the city's voters had never once elected three racial extremists to the City Commission. In 1961, citizens of the Birmingham departed from tradition and selected three outspoken segregationists to govern the city. Arthur Hanes, J.T. "Jabo" Waggoner, and Bull Connor each ran on the shared platform of racial segregation "at any cost."²⁷ Their supporters urged Birmingham to elect as its leaders

²⁵ Lillian Douglass, interview with Horace Huntley, 18 June 1998, BCRI.

²⁶ Vann, interview, BCRI.

²⁷ Vann, interview, BCRI.

men “who will stand staunchly and unswervingly on the side of complete separation of the races.”²⁸ Running against moderates Tom King and Earl Bruner, Hanes and Waggoner won majorities in only some working-class districts. The poorer neighborhoods of East Lake, Woodlawn, and the steelworkers of Ensley voted for the segregationists. Whereas King and Bruner won the non-craft working-class districts of American Cast Iron Pipe Company (APIPCO), Stockham Valves Company, and Tennessee Coal and Iron and Railroad Company (TCI), along with the African-American neighborhood near Legion Field.²⁹ Social class did not serve as a strict determinant in Bull Connor’s reelection either. Even as Connor garnered much of his electoral strength from many working-class neighborhoods, his campaign in 1961 was funded largely by businessmen in and out of the city. Jim Simpson, TCI lawyer, former state senator, and Connor’s close friend, collected political funds from men across Jefferson County. Many of these funds were collected at the elite and prestigious Mountain Brook Country Club.³⁰ As for Connor, the unions and the industrialists outwardly supported his candidacy. According to the Birmingham banker and member of the YMBC, Charles Zukowski, even the *Birmingham News*, which Connor had consistently attacked, supported him to regain community favor. “No one in Birmingham, regardless of wealth or prestige, was willing to buck the incumbent Connor.”³¹

While Connor was well known, Hanes and Waggoner were relatively new to Birmingham’s political scene; neither seemed to be highly regarded. Duard Lagrand,

²⁸ “Committee to Keep Birmingham White” Pamphlet found in Michael Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them.”

²⁹ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 3 May 1961 and 31 May 1961.

³⁰ Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” Chapter 6, published interview with Jim Simpson.

³¹ Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” 140, published interview with Charles Zukowski.

editor of the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, believed that Hanes was elected partly because of his ties to the city's elites. The son of one of Birmingham's most beloved Baptist ministers, Arthur Hanes was a wealthy attorney with a son at Princeton. The affluent in Birmingham found Hanes to be an attractive candidate and, with their financial support, he led in the polls. According to Lagrand, Hanes' candidacy "was the first time that the elitist support was openly manifested."³² His potential as mayor "made many of the over the mountain elite believe that this was their chance to control the direction of the city."³³ After the Freedom Riders arrived in Birmingham, Hanes became "lean and mean," which increased his appeal for many voters, who loved "the scrapper who wanted desperately to win."³⁴ Hanes organized the Committee to Keep Birmingham White, a group which published a pamphlet, *The Negro Bloc Vote and Your Future* in which Hanes declared that he would staunchly oppose integration.³⁵ The committee also circulated a photograph of his opponent, Thomas King, shaking hands with an unidentified black man with the caption, "Keep Birmingham White."³⁶ Once Connor threw his support behind Hanes, many of the working class and the elite whites "fell in line under the segregationist banner."³⁷ Hanes won a landslide victory, garnering votes in the working-class districts and carrying the affluent neighborhoods along Highland Avenue.³⁸

³² Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 138, published interview with Duard Lagrand.

³³ Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 138, published interview with Duard Lagrand.

³⁴ Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 139, published interview with Duard Lagrand.

³⁵ "The Negro Bloc and Your Future" Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 10, BPLAD.

³⁶ "The Negro Bloc and Your Future" Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 10, BPLAD.

³⁷ Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 138, published interview with Duard Lagrand.

³⁸ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 31 May 1961.

But the May 1961 election would be the last time that Waggoner, Hanes, and Connor won in Birmingham. In the following year, the majority of the city's whites no longer rallied behind an unswerving stand on segregation. In Birmingham, as in much of the urban South, working-class whites realized that their children would be the ones to shoulder the weight of integration. By 1962, after Connor, Hanes, and Waggoner closed down all of the public parks, working whites understood that they and their children could also be the victims of white intransigence.

“How Not to Have Anything”: Closed Parks and Working-Class Moderation

On March 1, 1960, a small group of African-American students from Miles and Daniel Payne colleges staged a quiet sit-in at Kelly Ingram Park to protest racial segregation in Birmingham's public spaces. Inspired by the sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, a month earlier, the college students entered the park to hold a “Prayer Vigil for Freedom.” They distributed leaflets promising to remain in the park, “as many weeks as our prayers are needed.”³⁹ Reluctant to let the protest continue, the Birmingham Police entered the park, arresting fourteen of the students and taking them to the police station.⁴⁰ Although the fourteen were never charged with a crime, the *Birmingham News* published their names and addresses that evening in an article detailing the protests and arrests. One week later, eight local Klansmen carrying iron pipes, clubs, and blackjacks walked into the home of Miles College student and protester, Robert Jones. Once inside, the eight men began to beat Jones, his mother, and his sister. Mattie Mae Jones, his mother, was hospitalized from the vicious beating. The following morning, when Connor's police department dispatched two sheriff's deputies to gather

³⁹ “Protest Scheduled,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1960, 20.

⁴⁰ “Protest Scheduled,” *New York Times*, 1 March 1960, 20.

information from her, she recognized them as her assailants from the previous evening.⁴¹ Nobody was charged with the crime.

Ten more students staged sit-ins in the downtown lunch counters on March 31. They, too, were arrested, along with Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and Reverend Charles Billups, and charged with breaching the peace. They were sentenced to six months in prison. The park and lunch counter protests closely followed an old pattern in which peaceful black protest evoked a violent response from local whites determined to maintain racial segregation and white supremacy. But by the fall of 1961, violence was no longer enough to “keep Birmingham white.”⁴² On October 24, 1961, Federal District Court Judge Hobart Grooms ruled that the municipal parks in Birmingham could no longer remain racially segregated. His decision, which affected all municipal public spaces, became effective on January 15, 1962.⁴³ Judge Grooms, in his order, noted: “The city is not required to operate or maintain any recreational facilities,” but if Birmingham’s parks remained open, “we have no alternative but to grant the relief prayed for.”⁴⁴

The reaction was immediate. The day after the decision, Commissioner Waggoner declared: “Judge Grooms has sounded the death knell of the public park system in Birmingham.” “As far as I’m concerned,” Commissioner Connor stated, “all

41 Eskew, *But For Birmingham*, 148-49.

42 “Keep Birmingham White” was the name of a group that formed to campaign for the election of Mayor Art Hanes in 1961, Nichols, “Cities are What Men Make Them,” 345.

43 “Second City Law on Mixing Voided,” *Birmingham News*, 25 October 1961.

44 Ivan Swift, “After Parks’ Ruling – City Facing Big Decision – Integration,” *Birmingham News*, 25 October 1961.

white and Negro parks, swimming pools, and golf links will be closed.”⁴⁵ “There will be blood on the streets before we integrate,” he promised.⁴⁶ When Shuttlesworth and other leaders in the black community requested a meeting with Hanes, the Mayor assured his constituents: “Don’t worry about the Negroes . . . I’m not gonna meet with ‘em. I’m not a summertime soldier, I don’t give up when the enemy shows up.”⁴⁷

Hanes’ allusion to soldiering was appropriate. When Judge Groom’s first handed down the ruling, the battle lines in Birmingham appeared to be clear, black versus white, segregation at all costs. But many whites in Birmingham refused to follow their commissioners into this battle. For businessmen, closed parks and racial turmoil were bad for business. As Smyer quickly noted, Little Rock, Arkansas had not welcomed any new industry since 1957, when the National Guard had to be brought in to defend four young African Americans on their first day at Little Rock Central High School.⁴⁸ Closed parks, swimming pools, baseball diamonds, and abandoned playgrounds affected the working class in Birmingham differently; while the wealthier families could take their children to private country clubs and open parks in suburbia, the children of the working class in Birmingham would be confined to the home and streets.

On December 11, Mayor Hanes held an open house meeting concerning the fate of Birmingham’s park system. He told those gathered that the city had cut funds for public recreation, laid-off park employees, and planned to shut down the parks in January of 1962 due to Groom’s ruling. The decision to close down Birmingham’s

⁴⁵ “Would Close Parks First, Two Commissioners Indicate,” *Birmingham News*, 26 October 1961.

⁴⁶ “People in Motion”, ed, ACMHR, Birmingham, 1966, 1, BPLAD.

⁴⁷ “Hanes Won’t Meet on Park Closing,” *Birmingham News*, 19 December 1961, 1.

⁴⁸ *Wall Street Journal*, 26 May 1961.

public facilities affected sixty-seven parks and playgrounds, eleven community centers, twenty-three soft-ball diamonds, twenty-two baseball diamonds, twenty-six football fields, sixty-two tennis courts, four golf courses, six swimming pools, the Municipal Auditorium and, potentially, the Jimmy Morgan Zoo, public libraries and museums. Many of Birmingham's white, working-class men attended to fight over the parks. Plugging into the discourse that resistance spelled a manly vigor, one man shouted that he supported Hanes "and the other red-blooded Americans."⁴⁹ However, the majority of men who voiced their opinion at the meeting opposed the decision. Class interests animated the debate in interesting ways. Those who spoke out against the city commission understood the park closures as a burden which only the working class of Birmingham would be forced to endure. One man asked Hanes not to close the parks, noting that while Hanes' son at Princeton will not be affected, his son will not have anywhere to play. Another man agreed, "maybe you (Hanes) have enough money to send your children to private schools but I, and most people in Birmingham, do not." Another angry citizen warned: "We will be nothing but a big, empty city . . . but we won't be integrated."⁵⁰

Birmingham's letter writers expressed mixed reactions, as well. "Birmingham is not going to cave in and surrender, Honor, Pride, Fight – Save the White" wrote National States' Rights Founder Dr. Edward Fields of Birmingham to Commissioner

⁴⁹ "Minutes from Open House Meeting Concerning Parks" 11 December 1961, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 15, File 1, BPLAD.

⁵⁰ "Minutes from Open House Meeting Concerning Parks" 11 December 1961, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 1, BPLAD.

Hanes just days before the meeting.⁵¹ Another letter to Connor exemplified the depth of resistance, even in the face of city park closures: “Let integration come at gunpoint or not at all,” urged a local man in a letter to Commissioner Hanes.⁵² When a *Birmingham-Post* reporter asked a soft-drink delivery man what would happen if the Birmingham’s parks and schools were desegregated, he replied, “They just ain’t. We’ll kill every damn nigger first.”⁵³ “I wish to go on record thanking you for closing the parks and for your courageous leadership,” wrote another resident, W.H. Gregory.⁵⁴ Seconding the notion that the City Commission’s decision was an act of bravery, Mrs. Thomas Elliot wrote to Connor in support, “You have plenty of courage to go against adverse opinion.”⁵⁵

Other whites did not see the boarded-up parks and threats of violence as expressions of southern, manly courage. In a letter to the City Commission, a local citizen, Albert Poole, appealed to a variant version of manhood: “As Christian men of the city of Birmingham, we pledge our support in to the solution of these problems.”⁵⁶ Noting the irony of a recent “celebration of youth” week, a local reverend argued, “To celebrate youth and then close the parks is like biting off our noses to spite our face. It is the realization that some things are even more important than segregation.”⁵⁷ One

⁵¹ Letter to Hanes from Dr. Edward Fields, 12 December 1961, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 1, BPLAD.

⁵² Letter to Hanes from Franklin B. McMahan, 20 January 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 16, BPLAD.

⁵³ Joe David Brown, “A City in Fear,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 2 March 1963, 17.

⁵⁴ W.H. Gregory to Connor, 17 January 1962, Connor Papers, Collection 265, Box 10, File 2, BPLAD.

⁵⁵ Mrs. Thomas Elliot to Connor, 10 January 1962, Connor Papers, Collection 265, Box 10, File 2, BPLAD.

⁵⁶ Albert Poole to City Commission, 2 April 1962, Connor Papers, Collection 265, Box 3, File 10, BPLAD.

⁵⁷ Dr. Reverend Collins to Hanes, 5 April 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 6, BPLAD.

angry man added: "We are not agitators, we are not out-of-towners. You are leading witch hunts. I am white. I am a voter. I have children and I would not miss the next election for Armageddon."⁵⁸ Still another citizen warned Connor, "I wish that you could see yourself as the majority sees you now. There is regret, unrest and shame among us all."⁵⁹ "No one wants to live in a city where there is a campaign to push one race of our people in the mud and keep them there."⁶⁰ Directing his rhetoric to Connor's ideas of southern masculinity, Reverend Shuttlesworth wrote to Connor that he had become "the picture of a once mighty lion now impotent."⁶¹

In January 1962, after the City Commission had already nailed "No Trespassing" signs of Birmingham's parks, 1,280 prominent whites of both city and suburb signed a full-page advertisement in the *Birmingham News* pleading for "common sense." Solutions "can be found only in dedicated and thoughtful consideration."⁶² The article insisted that a city without public recreation will not only decline economically but also witness an increase in juvenile delinquency.⁶³ City commissioners instantly remarked that a great many of the signatures on the advertisement came from the pen of men who lived over-the-mountain in unincorporated suburbs, middle and upper-class men whose children would not face racial integration. Connor easily concluded that the people living above Birmingham would let the working-class, city dwellers carry the

⁵⁸ Anonymous to Hanes, 15 April 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 6, BPLAD.

⁵⁹ Laura Reynolds to Hanes, 5 April 1962, , Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 46, BPLAD.

⁶⁰ Travis Wolfe to Waggoner, 9 December 1962, Waggoner Papers, Collection 346, Box 7, File 10, BPLAD.

⁶¹ Shuttlesworth to Connor, no date, Connor Papers, Collection 265, Box 7, File 4, BPLAD.

⁶² "A Plea for Courage and Common Sense" David Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 25, File 40, BPLAD.

⁶³ "A Plea for Courage and Common Sense" David Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 25, File 40, BPLAD.

burden of integration while the rich men in Homewood and Vestavia Hills could comfortably assess the bottom line.⁶⁴ Using class as a cleaver, Connor attempted to rally working-class support for the closed parks. It did not work. In the same month that Birmingham's businessmen plead for "common sense," the *Birmingham Post-Herald* polled 1200 city residents asking those who lived within Birmingham's limits about the park closures. In a city full of working-class men and women, the vast majority of respondents (71 percent) requested that the parks be integrated rather than closed, the exception being public pools.⁶⁵

While middle and upper-class white men from above the city demanded thoughtful leadership in an effort to save Birmingham's national image and local economy, those people who lived in the city were more interested in the daily lives of their children. Most of those polled, almost three-fourths, decided that they would rather have integrated parks than closed parks. Still, the rhetorical battle regarding the park closures reflected the traditional lines of class tensions between Birmingham whites. Common sense, economic consideration and moderation sought to trump vociferous appeals to tradition, local sovereignty, and proud resistance. Class and gender-coded language obscured the lines of battle. Rhetorically, the debate was classed and billed as a culture war between men collared in white and those in blue. The advocates for closed parks insisted that the working people of Birmingham should not cower to the men who live "over the mountain." However, the majority of resistance to the park closures came from those same working men and women who lived in the city and wanted public

⁶⁴ "Connor's Statement Regarding the Parks" *Birmingham News* 30 January 1962.

⁶⁵ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 28 January 1962.

spaces for their children, noting that they did not have the money to join the country club. The classed and gendered language that characterized the battle over Birmingham's parks continued throughout 1962 as the city moved to turn Bull Connor out of office. In his fight to save his political life, Connor worked to besmirch the intentions of the suburban business interests to play on the resentments of the lower class in Birmingham. Race and class were his political stand-bys, but by 1962 they were no longer enough.

A *Time* magazine article in May 1962 captured the mood of the city, a "grim, grimy post-bellum steel town," in which the residents were slowly learning "how not to have anything."⁶⁶ The closed parks left "Birmingham's citizens with much time on their hands to ponder the price of intransigence."⁶⁷ School integration, scheduled to begin in the fall, forced parents to contemplate the prospect of closed schools to accompany the chained and boarded parks and playgrounds. While the Freedom Rides awakened the business community to the need for political reform, working families in the valley began to reevaluate their devotion to absolute segregation as they walked past empty pools and abandoned parks. For the first time since the 1954 *Brown* decision, Birmingham's white residents engaged in a public debate concerning the importance of segregation and the path that was beginning to teach the city "how not to have anything."⁶⁸

"We are Learning to be Men": Getting Rid of Bull Connor

In February 1961, Sydney Smyer wrote to Walter Mms, president of the Birmingham Bar Association, to request an investigation into the possibility of changing

⁶⁶ "How Not to Have Anything," *Time*, 4 May 1962.

⁶⁷ "How Not to Have Anything," *Time*, 4 May 1962.

⁶⁸ "How Not to Have Anything," *Time*, 4 May 1962.

the City Commission form of government in the city. Exactly one month later, Mims appointed a 15-member committee to look into the process and advisability of a new form of government. By April 5, 1961, the committee held their first meeting to discuss and explore the option of changing the city government. In the ensuing sixty days, Bull Connor swept the election for Public Safety Commissioner, the Freedom Riders arrived and were violently and publicly beaten with the cooperation from Commissioner Connor's police force and, in the harried aftermath, Birmingham residents elected extremists Arthur Hanes and "Jabo" Waggoner to rule the city alongside Bull.

On July 14, 1961, David Brook presented the findings of the committee's study by stating that, "The city of Birmingham should have a form of government which will result in men of such quality leading it."⁶⁹ Birmingham was the only city of its size left in the South with a three-man commission as its municipal government. On October 20, the fifteen member committee met and voted, with only one exception, for a new form of government – a mayor-council form - in Birmingham. By February of 1962, Birmingham's citizens were aware that change was an option. When the Chamber of Commerce conducted an open response survey, the majority of city residents penciled in that the number one public concern for the city should be the change in Birmingham's form of government.⁷⁰ Sensing the dissatisfaction in the city, Connor, Hanes, and Waggoner issued a long public pronouncement declaring that Birmingham will never yield to the federal government and urged the citizens to stay strong: "It will do no good for us to bow to the Supreme Court. . . Do not bend your neck and kiss the hand of the

⁶⁹ "Findings," Vann Paper, Collection 113, Box 25, File 34, BPLAD.

⁷⁰ "Findings," Vann Paper, Collection 113, Box 25, File 34, BPLAD.

tyrant.”⁷¹ Locating southern manhood in its opposition to the federal government did not dissuade city residents from registering their concerns with the commissioners in the local survey, a remarkable departure from the previous year after the Freedom Rides. In March 1962, Commissioner Connor and the city commission, in an effort to demonstrate that they were willing to quell any and all black activism, exploded any semblance of decency. Reacting to a “selective buying campaign” planned by local African-American students to force downtown stores to hire blacks clerks, desegregate their facilities, and to pressure the municipal government to give civil service jobs to qualified African Americans, the Commission cut the city’s surplus food program which donated food to poor and hungry families, publicly exclaiming, now, “the Negroes will know who their true friends and benefactors are. Over 90 percent of recipients are Negroes. Let Core and NAACP feed you!”⁷² In the many letters written to the city commissioners, only three wrote in support of the decision to keep food from hungry families. The majority of letter writers in Birmingham and across the nation expressed disgust at the “savage and vengeful” decision to withhold food.⁷³ An article in the *New York Times* entitled, “Birmingham Uses Biscuits” proclaimed that the City Commissioners “starve the helpless for acts of the ambitious.” Birmingham became “identified with a morality that would hold a biscuit away from an unfed child.”⁷⁴ The termination of the surplus food program propelled the change-of-government committee to press forward.

⁷¹ “The Long Statement Issued by the City Commission of Birmingham Regarding Integration” 20 January 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box 5, File 14.

⁷² “Hanes Statement,” 4 April 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box, 5, File 46, BPLAD.

⁷³ Roy Wilkins to Hanes, 7 April 1962, Hanes Papers, Collection 269, Box, 5, File 46, BPLAD.

⁷⁴ Eugene Patterson, “Birmingham Uses Biscuits,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1962.

In July, attorney David Vann, realtor Smyer, and attorney Abraham Berkowitz began to work on preparing a new form of government by the May election in 1963. Vann, who worked as a clerk for Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black during the 1954 *Brown* decision and would later become the city mayor in 1975, warned Birmingham's businessmen that the commission form of government in the city would accelerate white flight, leaving the politics of the city in the hands of the remaining black population.⁷⁵ Vann, Smyer, and Berkowitz were all members of the Young Men's Business Club (YMBC) of Birmingham, a group of young executives, lawyers, newspapermen, engineers, architects, and merchants. The Club was established in the 1950s as a means to build a network among young businessmen who would meet every Monday to discuss city development and politics. By the 1960s, as the racial climate had a deleterious effect on business, the YMBC strived for greater control over Birmingham's politics.⁷⁶ Hiring a public relations firm, the YMBC promoted the idea of a new form of government through fundraising dinners, television ads, bumper stickers, stationary, campaign cards, lapel pins, newspaper ads, billboards, and direct mail.⁷⁷ The firm selected a bell as the trademark for the newly christened, "Citizens for Progress" group. The motto of the campaign, "The Bells of Birmingham Ring for Progress" symbolized "hope, decency, and unity," according the PR firm and played on the idea of church bells in Birmingham, the city of churches. The YMBC argued that the symbol and the

⁷⁵ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 27 October 1962.

⁷⁶ Charles Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 9.

⁷⁷ Harold Thomas PR Firm to YMBC," 15 September 1962, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 25, File 35, BPLAD.

slogan would motivate men to be “useful, moral, and wholesome.”⁷⁸ The group pushed and professionally crafted a new type of man, one focused on restraint and Christian goodness. Separating themselves from the traditional and rural South, the members of the YMBC understood themselves to represent a modern, more enlightened and rational South.

In July, Dave Campbell, a Birmingham talk show host, suggested to Vann that the YMBC needed to move on the idea as soon as possible. Vann telephoned Berkowitz and scheduled a meeting for the following day between the Executive Committee of Birmingham’s Chamber of Commerce and Don Stafford, the President of the Birmingham Labor Council. Vann, realizing that they needed the signatures of the city’s regular people, incorporated Stafford in the planning phase of the petition. In order to change the government, Vann told his associates, they needed both business and working men. At the meeting, Stafford encouraged the business leaders to join with labor to move forward; “I always think my labor man talked the businessmen into doing it,” reflected Vann.⁷⁹

Before leaving the meeting, the group decided that they needed twenty-five respected businessmen to head up the petition to get the vote on the ballot. Those gathered planned to contact the twenty-five and meet the next day. When they returned the following day, every one of the twenty-five businessmen refused to support put their name on a petition to oust the city commission. They offered money but were afraid to

⁷⁸ Harold Thomas PR Firm to YMBC,” 15 September 1962, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 25, File 35, BPLAD.

⁷⁹ Vann, interview, BCRI.

publicly oppose against Connor.⁸⁰ Faced with possible defeat, Smyer declared: “If we can’t get twelve silk stockings, let’s get five-hundred anybodies.”⁸¹ Vann, Smyer, Berkowitz, and Stafford set out to collect signatures from five hundred of Birmingham’s workers and small businessmen.⁸² Vann mimeographed a document which read: “I hereby agree to be a member of the Birmingham Citizen’s for Progress. To sponsor a petition to give the people of Birmingham the right to decide for themselves what form of government is best for their city.” Vann went to the *Birmingham News* and *Birmingham Post-Herald* and informed about their plans, but requested that they not publish anything until they gathered the signatures. By Sunday morning, signatures in hand, both papers published front-page stories about the city’s new group, Birmingham’s Citizens for Progress (BCP), five-hundred strong. Within hours, the group became inundated with phone calls from around the city, including people from Kennedy for President Campaign, the Nixon for President Campaign, the labor unions, and the Chamber of Commerce, the real estate board, and the PTA council.”⁸³ To put the option of a changed form of municipal government on the ballot, the Citizens for Progress needed 7,500 signatures. They got 12,000 in one day without going near the African-American neighborhoods. “We wanted to stay as far away from the racial problems as we could,” Vann remembered. He would not even call a black person on the phone because “I was sure my telephone was tapped.”⁸⁴ In an effort to block the petition, the

⁸⁰ Vann, interview, BCRI.

⁸¹ Christopher MacGregor Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham: Federal Funding and the Promise of Change, 1929-1979*, (Athens: University of Georgia, 2002); 113.

⁸² Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 113.

⁸³ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 114.

⁸⁴ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 114.

city commission threatened city workers with their jobs. Letters poured into Vann's office from city workers who requested that their names be removed from the petition for fear that the commissioners would strip them of their job.⁸⁵

Once the question was on the ballot, it was up to the city's voters to decide. They could choose a city commission, a mayor-council, or a city-manager form of government. The BCP supported the mayor-council. On November 6, 1962, voters in Birmingham went to the polls to vote for Alabama's governor and to decide the form of government. By the evening, Birmingham citizens learned that George Wallace would be Alabama's new governor and that they would have a mayor-council form of government in the spring. The majority of Birmingham's electorate was mostly men, mostly white, and mostly working class. On November 6, 1962, after almost a year of closed parks and unrestrained violence, Birmingham voted 52 percent to 45.5 percent for a new form of government.⁸⁶

More than any other group, African Americans affected the outcome of the election. Since the 1961 election when Bull Connor won his most decisive political victory, more African Americans had registered to vote and therefore held a greater sway over the percentages. Working-class whites also affected the outcome. Connor lost some of his lower-class precincts in the 1962 referendum. His hometown, lower-class neighborhood of Woodlawn (which he carried in 1957 and 1961), voted in 1962 to turn him.⁸⁷ Vann touted the victory as an achievement of the middle class which was tied to a new version of southern manhood: "We have awakened from our apathy. We

⁸⁵ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 114.

⁸⁶ *Birmingham News*, 6 November 1962.

⁸⁷ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 188.

have lost the fear of personal attack. We are learning to be men and our newfound virility gives us confidence in ourselves and in our city,” he exclaimed.⁸⁸ With a budding virility, the new southern businessmen presented the city with a new man, one dressed in a suit with progress and moderation in mind. There is little doubt that these men, regardless of the underlying rationale, helped to facilitate racial progress in Birmingham. The business-class presence in the public eye and in the public record extended beyond Birmingham.⁸⁹ However, the widespread attention garnered by and given to the middle-class men in this progressive time in Birmingham’s history shrouded a critical shift among working-class whites who had gone to the polls and voted to move beyond their ugly past.

The resolve of Birmingham’s residents was tested five months later in the run-off mayoral election. Three candidates competed: Bull Connor, Senator Albert Boutwell, a professed moderate, and Thomas King, the most liberal choice on the ticket. Boutwell communicated calm and respect for the law, but he was not interested in racial equality. He had been a part of the conservative legal and business community which espoused the racial moderation as a “betrayal of South and its heritage” in the 1950s.⁹⁰ Boutwell, along with Birmingham’s elite segregationists, “not only attained an almost undisputed hegemony, but also created a vacuum of leadership among the city’s less powerful moderate leaders” in the months and years after *Brown*.⁹¹ Boutwell was Alabama’s biggest and most public advocate of the Freedom of Choice Plan, making over 100

⁸⁸ “Press Release,” 28 September 1962, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 25, File 36, BPLAD.

⁸⁹ Burt Schorr, “Battle of Birmingham” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 March 1962.

⁹⁰ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 2 July 1954.

⁹¹ *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 2 July 1954.

speeches to push for a plan which would effectively duck school integration. By 1963, Boutwell's rhetoric was more moderate; he walked the fine line between reaction and racial compromise. "The Day the Courage Flowered" headlined the *Birmingham News* article which followed the first round of voting on March 6, 1963. The returns placed Boutwell eight percent points ahead of Connor while King did not garner enough votes to remain in the race. The *News* article celebrated the results, "The image of Birmingham is an image of a people who speak for us. The words of our leaders are rough, hard, and inflame passions. The strong margin of Boutwell over Connor means people want dignity and thoughtful responsibility in the mayor's office."⁹²

On March 12, Boutwell and Connor kicked off their head-to-head election by sitting down to an arm wrestling match. Boutwell, a tall, elegant man in a pressed white shirt clasped hands with Connor, a stout man with thick, black-rimmed glasses in a short-sleeve white shirt as the press looked on and snapped photographs. Although the winner was not reported, the picture of the two men appeared on the cover of the *Birmingham News* to announce the ensuing battle in Birmingham. For the next two months, Birmingham's whites found themselves amidst a polarized political climate. White, southern manhood appeared to be at stake in the election and both Connor and Boutwell fought for both the votes of southern, white men as well as the meanings behind southern manhood.

Born in 1904, Albert Boutwell was raised in Greenville, Alabama and attended University of Alabama, earning his law degree in 1928. Boutwell practiced law in Birmingham from 1928-1946, when he was elected to the state senate where he served

⁹² "The Day that Courage Flowered" *Birmingham News*, 5 March 1963.

three terms. During his last term, Boutwell served as Chairman of the Interim Legislative Committee on Segregation in the Public Schools. In 1958, Alabama voters elected Boutwell to be Lieutenant Governor under John Patterson. In 1962, when Boutwell campaigned to become Birmingham's next mayor, his historic stand on school segregation helped to win support from whites who believed in white supremacy, but had grown tired of Connor's tactics.⁹³

Southern tradition and white women comprised the ideological core of Bull Connor's new campaign. Commenting on his political persona, Connor's executive secretary described his boss: "Bull was a reactionary. He has the Civil War instinct to fight, even if you know you will lose . . . when Bull was cornered, he came out fighting."⁹⁴ In an apt description of his opponent, Connor declared that his opponent was "only the image created by the newspapers and the people over the mountain."⁹⁵ Using the rhetoric of traditional, southern manhood, Connor was to "secure the vote of the womenfolk" by visiting every "ladies club and garden club in Birmingham."⁹⁶ Alongside Connor's appeal to local women, a group named "Ladies for Connor" became part of his campaign. Harkening back to the gender roles of the Old South, the "Ladies for Connor" club was a group of women assembled by Connor's campaign responsible for calling Birmingham's white men and pleading with them to vote for Bull to "keep them safe."⁹⁷ The traditional gender roles espoused by Connor were not enough to secure his re-

⁹³ Biography of Boutwell, Alabama Department of Archives Website, <http://www.birminghamarchives.org/CivilRightsBirmingham2.htm>, accessed 12 December 2011.

⁹⁴ Nichols, "Cities are What Men Make Them," 250, Published Preddy Interview.

⁹⁵ Nicholls, "City are What Men Make Them, 233.

⁹⁶ "Election Papers," Connor Papers, Collection 268, Box 10, File 1, BPLAD.

⁹⁷ "Election Papers," Connor Papers, Collection 268, Box 10, File 1, BPLAD

election. On April 1, 1963, Albert Boutwell beat “Bull” Connor decisively, 58 percent to 42 percent, effectively ending Connor’s political career.⁹⁸ On April 2, the *Birmingham News* excitedly proclaimed “New Day Dawns for Birmingham.” Boutwell, who received 29,630 votes won boxes in Shades Valley, the Highland Avenue district, and the black boxes. He also carried the silk stocking district on the Southside, two of the five districts in working-class East Lake, three of the four boxes in working-class Woodlawn, and all of the working-class districts of Pratt City, Stockham Valves, and ACIPCO. Connor carried the lower, middle-class votes of West End and a few of the working-class boxes in East Lake and one in Woodlawn, ending the election with 21,648 votes.⁹⁹ The majority of the working class in Birmingham had crossed over from the 1961 election to the election of 1963.

Public officials such as Connor appealed to their working-class constituency by couching segregation in notions of tradition, southern honor, and the duty of working people – noting that those who advocated integration lived in Birmingham’s un-annexed and lily-white suburbs. White businessmen, on the other hand, led by the Young Men’s Business Club (YMBC), pushed for open parks, racial moderation, and an end to the racial violence. But Birmingham’s men and women belied these types—and the rhetoric and the class encasements touted by both Connor and the YMBC. Many poor and working-class residents moved away from the “sleeping dog-lyism,” as one reporter described Birmingham’s philosophy towards integration and publicly fought for open, integrated parks and the expulsion of Bull Connor.

⁹⁸ “New Day Dawns for Birmingham” *Birmingham News*, 2 April 1963.

⁹⁹ *Birmingham News*, 3 April 1963.

Conclusion

In Birmingham, Alabama, between 1960 and 1961, the model of white, southern masculinity so prevalent in the mid to late 1950s, splintered. A smarter, calmer, more reasonable man challenged the stubborn southerner who vowed to fight and kill for the preservation of segregation and the protection of his way of life. While some, indeed most, of Birmingham's whites began the 1960s railing against the federal government's usurpation of state and local power, white opposition to the racial extremism of Birmingham's social and political power structure began to trickle into public discourse by the winter of 1961. Closed parks, city-wide boycotts, lost economic opportunities, national condemnation, and deep injustices stacked the mounting cost of Jim Crow upon both sides of the color line. Propagating and shouldering many of these burdens in Birmingham became the sine qua non of white southern manhood as the civil rights movement settled in the city. Acknowledging the power of the gendered implications embedded in racial extremism, white moderates were forced to subvert the definition of what it meant to be a white, southern man. The ascension of the middle-class moderate, while important to the dissolution of the Big Mule consensus, has overshadowed his calculated complicity in the racial order up until 1963 and has fixed our understanding of lower-class whites in the civil rights era as bigoted and ignorant men.

CHAPTER 5

“STANDING IN IMAGINED RECTITUDE”

“As we have segregated the Negroes, we have become ignorant of them” wrote southern philosopher James McBride Dabbs in 1958, “not knowing what they are, we tend to think of them as being the same as in those fearful days” of Reconstruction.¹ Commenting on white southerners’ willful ignorance concerning blacks, African-American poet and activist James Baldwin explained: “The black man has functioned in the white man’s world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar.”² But when the black man “moves out of his place,” Baldwin predicted, “heaven and earth” will be “shaken to their foundations.”³ Dabbs echoed Baldwin’s projections of deep crisis in the South when he acknowledged that segregation held within it “the lives, hopes, customs of our fathers,” much of what made the region sacred to white men.⁴ In the 1950s and early 1960s, the black man, to borrow Baldwin’s phrase, moved out of his place. In Birmingham, the movement came in 1963, and with it, the crisis.

In recent years, Timothy Tyson, Steve Estes, and Danielle McGuire have argued for the centrality of black manhood in the southern freedom struggle.⁵ The utility of gender analysis has encouraged an examination into the importance and function of African-American masculinity in the Movement, but the assertion that black manhood

¹ Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 71.

² Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 11.

³ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 11

⁴ Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 164

⁵ Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance- a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010); Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999).

was an essential aspect of the Struggle was and remains obvious. The dependence of southern, white masculinity on black inferiority in the first half of the twentieth century is no less obvious; southerners and southern historians readily acknowledge that the meanings implied by southern racism have been dialogically constructed. Baldwin knew this is 1962 when he considered how white men correlated racial equality with “the loss of their identity.”⁶ Dabbs illuminated the other aspect of southerners’ relative sense of self when he postulated that the ultimate goal of the Struggle was not legal, economic, or political parity. Rather, “equality in manhood” drove the movement; integration and the franchise existed as the demonstrative features of this primary goal.⁷

In response to local and federal pressure, white men in Birmingham relinquished many of the accoutrements of superiority, such as all-white dining halls, department store fitting rooms, and schools. Still, throughout the 1960s, whites in the valley and over the mountain held fast to the notion of white, male superiority. White men of varying social classes expressed their devotion to racial supremacy differently. Among the working-classes, public and private letters, neighborhood associations, and street rallies characterized the most tangible form of protest against school and neighborhood integration. Middle-class whites and self-proclaimed business moderates expressed their fealty to white supremacy through token integration, false promises of change, and a growing anxiety about the perceived racial and gendered ambiguity in young, white male “beatniks.” Boutwell, Smyer, and the newly organized Senior Citizens’ Committee,

⁶ Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 11

⁷ Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 164

worked diligently through the year to placate the local black community in order to manage their image and that of the city.

Boutwell's victory over Conner in 1963 signified the corruption of a shared language of backlash in Birmingham. The ascent of the business-class moderate and the attendant images of a more respectable and fair-minded southern man fused class with racial sentiment. However, Boutwell and men around him did not challenge nor complicate the underlying assumptions of white, male privilege; they only fastened freshly starched, white collars on old southern prerogatives. Recounting the turmoil and violence of 1963, this chapter demonstrates that the growing influence of black political power in Birmingham unmasked white respectability in the city. Massive demonstrations intensified white fears about the increasing power of the black community and school desegregation brought with it a renewed sense of urgency to vilify black men, protect white women, and steer young, white men into the fold of a socially conservative and racially intolerant white, southern mindset.

The first portion of this chapter details the demonstrations in Birmingham and the forced negotiations between the black movement leaders and the white business leaders. Using Fred Shuttlesworth's records of the planning stages of the protests, first-hand accounts of the negotiations, and newspaper articles which describe the eventual agreement, the first section demonstrates that Birmingham's white businessmen have received undue credit in bringing racial peace to the city. The outside press lauded the city's white businessmen, portraying them as the only and "last hope" for the backward South, publicly and for the record erasing their complicity in the racial order.⁸ However,

⁸ James C. Tanner, "Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South's Economic Rise," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963.

the architects of the organized boycotts and protests across Birmingham in 1963 directed pressure on the business class, not the blue collars nor the politicians. That the businessmen relented is not a testament to their moderate racial views, but rather evidence that they felt enough financial pressure to seek compromise. It took Boutwell, Smyer, and the Senior Citizen's Committee almost five weeks to begin discussions with the black leaders. Ultimately, what is most revealing is the fact that white moderate businessmen never made good on their promises.⁹ As soon as King called off the demonstrations, the urgency to meet the demands disappeared.

Boutwell's election did not usher in a "new day for Birmingham."¹⁰ In response to the growing assertiveness of the black community, Birmingham endured its most frenzied year of white-on-black violence under his watch. In 1963, whites bombed African-American homes, businesses, and churches. Rather than urging peace across the valley, Boutwell stoked the fight against school integration, refused to bring any of the bombers to justice, and failed to restrain the outspoken malevolence of much of the white community.

The second part of this chapter explores the disjuncture between the terrible shame brought on by the Sixteenth Street Church bombing which killed four young African-American girls and the remaining angst in the white community regarding school integration. The aftermath of the bombing provided a platform for southern liberals to express their disgust with Birmingham's moneyed and moderate men, as well as the

⁹ "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work: Merchants Failed Again" September 1963, William Hamilton Papers, Collection 256, Box 3, File 6, BPLAD.

¹⁰ "New Day Dawns for Birmingham," *Birmingham News*, 2 April 1963.

entirety of the white South for watching as “the stage was set without staying it.”¹¹ In Birmingham, while men and women across the city mourned the death of four innocent children, pressure mounted to freeze integration in its tracks. Private schools opened, white women begged their leaders for protection as they took their children to school, and white men denounced token integration lest their daughters and wives fall victim to oversexed black men. Consistent with the fears of the previous decade, which centered on the black-jacketed, rebellious rock n’ roller, parents in Birmingham expressed anxiety about a new kind of young, white male: an intellectual beatnik who was susceptible to Communism, anarchy, and integration. Using the specters of black men who sought sex with white women, along with deviant images of young, white, un-athletic, social critics, the second portion of this chapter argues that the Movement propelled the white community to reestablish explicitly heteronormative and patriarchal gender roles while shedding the violent edge personified by Bull Connor. Attempting to capitalize on the discourse of imperiled white women and undisciplined young beatniks, Birmingham’s whites sought to maintain control over race and gender relations.

The Children’s Crusade

One day after Mayor Albert Boutwell defeated Connor in the mayoral election of 1963, Birmingham’s local African Americans launched a boycott of the city’s downtown stores. Designed in January 1963 through the cooperation of Martin Luther King’s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and Fred Shuttlesworth’s Alabama Christian Movement for Human Right (ACMHR), the Easter season boycott and

¹¹ “Southern Editor Writes Apology, a Flower for the Graves,” *Washington Post*, 18 September 1963, A6.

demonstrations were originally designed to begin in March.¹² But when Boutwell and Connor met each other in a run-off election for mayor, Shuttlesworth urged the SCLC to postpone the demonstrations, fearing that the turmoil might push more votes toward Connor.¹³

After surveying the political landscape in Birmingham, SCLC's leaders concluded that the demands of the Birmingham demonstrations should be modest and attainable without the consent of Birmingham's local government. They pointed their demonstrations towards the business community, challenging integration in privately-owned spaces. Designed by King, Shuttlesworth, and SCLC Executive Director, Wyatt Tee Walker, the goals of the Birmingham movement included the desegregation of lunch counters and other facilities open to the public in downtown stores, fair hiring practices in those stores, including employment of qualified African Americans for white-collar jobs, the establishment of a biracial group to work out a timetable for the desegregation of all Birmingham public schools, and the reopening of city parks and playgrounds.¹⁴ Soon after the demonstrations began, a fifth requirement was added, that the charges brought by the businesses against those arrested would be dropped.¹⁵ More than anyone else, Walker orchestrated the Birmingham movement. From February to March, he designed "Project X" while working closely with Birmingham's black community.¹⁶ Attorney Arthur Shores educated Walker regarding the ordinances

¹² Correspondence between Rev. Walker to Rev. Shuttlesworth, Shuttlesworth Collection, Box 4, King Center.

¹³ "Tentative Schedule for Project X – Birmingham," Shuttlesworth Collection, Box 4, King Center.

¹⁴ "Connor and King Head to Birmingham Clash," *Washington Post*, 5 April 1963.

¹⁵ "Connor and King Head to Birmingham Clash," *Washington Post*, 5 April 1963.

¹⁶ "Tentative Schedule for Project X – Birmingham," Shuttlesworth Collection, Box 4, King Center.

and bail bond procedures of the city and he met with religious and community leaders to rally support. Walker mapped out the exact locations for the coming sit-ins, even counting the tables and stools at many of the lunch counters in downtown Birmingham.¹⁷

From the outset, SCLC's Project X targeted the white businessmen, many of whom resided outside of the city limits but earned their living in Birmingham.¹⁸ King, Walker, and Shuttlesworth selected the prominent industrial leaders, the "Big Mules" of Birmingham, along with local shop owners and bankers as the campaign's pressure points.¹⁹ During a three-day planning session in Savannah, King and SCLC movement leaders concluded, "a more effective battle could be waged if it was concentrated on one aspect of the evil and intricate system of segregation."²⁰ The struggle in Birmingham was to be centered entirely on the white business community.

On April 3, just a day after Birmingham elected Boutwell, twenty well-dressed volunteer members of ACHMR walked in and sat down at lunch counters in Britling Cafeteria, Woolworth's, Pizitz, Kress, and Loveman's department stores.²¹ Word reached Connor and he rushed into the business district to end the sit-ins. Birmingham police arrested four men and two of the lunch counters closed for the day. Whites bristled at the demonstrations, angry on account of the fact that just one day earlier, the city had voted to turn out Bull Connor and to begin a new era with Mayor-elect

¹⁷ Martin Luther King, *Why We Can't Wait* (Signet Publishing Company, 1964), 42.

¹⁸ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 42.

¹⁹ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 42.

²⁰ King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 40.

²¹ "Nab 4 of 20 Staging Sit-In In Birmingham," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 4 April 1963.

Boutwell.²² Martin Luther King responded to white frustration by stating that the black community could no longer wait. "This may test the good faith of the new image in this city. We feel Mr. Boutwell will never desegregate Birmingham voluntarily. Our cup of endurance runneth over."²³ Amidst the incredulity of the city's whites, the demonstrations continued. On April 5, 1963, Shuttlesworth sent a telegram to Commissioner Connor to request a permit to "picket peacefully" in the business district. Connor replied with a telegram telling Shuttlesworth to stay out off of the streets of Birmingham.²⁴ On April 6, policemen arrested forty-two marchers as they knelt to reportedly pray for the City of Birmingham and "Bull" Connor. In response, Connor yelled to his men, "Let's get this thing over with. I'm hungry."²⁵ By that evening, Connor's men had arrested seventy-six demonstrators, thirty-five of whom were convicted on charges of trespass after warning, sentenced six months in prison, and fined \$100. King called a news conference on the evening of April 6 during which he promised perseverance: "We do not plan to stop. Something will go on every day until peaceful equality is assured in the downtown area."²⁶

As the demonstrations escalated, Connor and Boutwell fought for control of the city. Even though Birmingham residents voted for the mayor-council form of government

²² Robert E. Baker, "Many Hold Birmingham Sit-Ins Ill-Timed to Achieve Goals," *Washington Post*, 6 April 1963, A4.

²³ Robert E. Baker, "Many Hold Birmingham Sit-Ins Ill-Timed to Achieve Goals," *Washington Post*, 6 April 1963, A4.

²⁴ 5 April 1963, Connor Papers, Box 13, File 2.

²⁵ "32 Negro Marchers Seized in Birmingham at Start of Prayer for Police Commissioner," *Washington Post Times Herald*, 7 April 1963, A2; Foster Hailey, "Birmingham Jails 42 Negroes in Protest Parade to City Hall," *New York Times*, 7 April 1963, 55.

²⁶ "32 Negro Marchers Seized in Birmingham at Start of Prayer for Police Commissioner," *Washington Post Times Herald*, 7 April 1963, A2; Foster Hailey, "Birmingham Jails 42 Negroes in Protest Parade to City Hall," *New York Times*, 7 April 1963, 55.

and elected Mayor Boutwell as their new leader, Commissioners Hanes, Connor, and Waggoner refused to leave until their term was set to expire in 1965. The Alabama Supreme Court would have to decide. Throughout the demonstrations in the spring of 1963, Birmingham had two mayors and two municipal governments. When a call came into City Hall with the request to speak to the Mayor, the response was often: “which one?”²⁷ While Mayor-elect Boutwell worked with the business community throughout the conflict, Commissioner Connor remained the public face of Birmingham’s police force.

On the morning of April 7, Palm Sunday, a parade of 600 African Americans walked through Birmingham’s downtown in what they referred to as a “prayer pilgrimage.” Stopped by a row of policemen, the protestors knelt to pray. Standing before a group African-American men and women on bended knee, a Birmingham officer yelled through his bullhorn, “You have one minute to leave” and proceeded to count the ticking seconds from his watch. After his count, the police scattered the peaceful crowd with police dogs.²⁸ The threat of violence did little to suppress the demonstrators’ resolve. The following day, young men and women demonstrated around the downtown stores holding signs which read, “Birmingham is also our city.” “Easter in Overalls,” the campaign to pressure the African-American community to refrain from purchasing new clothes for Easter, began to hurt business. Owners reported losses between ten and twenty-five percent.²⁹ To keep up the pressure,

²⁷ Claude Sitton, “Birmingham Jails 1,000 More Negroes Protesting Segregation,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1963.

²⁸ Claude Sitton “Birmingham Jails 1,000 More Negroes Protesting Segregation,” *New York Times*, 7 May 1963.

²⁹ James C. Tanner, “Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South’s Economic Rise”, *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963, 1.

students from the historically black Miles College walked around the retail stores to send black customers away.³⁰ On March 12, Good Friday, Connor's men arrested King prompting President Kennedy to cut his Easter vacation short to confer with Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall about Birmingham.³¹ On the day of King's arrest, eight of Birmingham's clergymen made a statement, "A Call for Unity," in which they appealed to the local black community, requesting patience.

In response to the statement, King wrote an open letter from the Birmingham jail in which he accused Boutwell and Birmingham's moderates of intransigence. "While Mr. Boutwell is much more articulate and gentle than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists." Discounting the power of the Citizen's Council and Klan, King chastised whites who expressed "goodwill" and "lukewarm acceptance" toward the Movement; "I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that he is the Negro's greatest stumbling block." It is the moderate, King wrote, who "is more devoted to order than to justice." King, Shuttlesworth, and the local black community knew that the moderate in Birmingham remained a supremacist, "who paternalistically feels that he can set a timetable for another man's freedom."³²

That same day, as if on cue, Mayor Hanes explained, "Negroes are a simple, happy people but the poor things are being exploited."³³ Publicly, Birmingham's

³⁰ James C. Tanner, "Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South's Economic Rise", *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963, 1.

³¹ "U.S. Says It Can't Act To Halt Birmingham Bias," *Chicago Daily Defender*, 15 April 1963, 4.

³² Martin Luther King, transcript "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 16 April 63, Burke Marshall Papers, BPLAD.

³³ "Hanes Says Red Behind Demonstrations," 16 May 1963, *Birmingham News*, 1.

residents clung to the notion that the upheaval came from outside of the city. Chairman of the Board at the First National Bank in Birmingham, General John Persons pointed to outside agitation when he told the city that “the money from Northerners went into King’s pocket . . . the only reason that the negras helped King at all was because he gave them two dollars a day.”³⁴ The narrative perpetuated by whites demonized King and SCLC for the “mobs of Negro children who, at the instigation of several professional rabble rousers have been creating havoc.”³⁵ Charles Morgan, a local attorney, racial liberal, and active YMBC member, wrote that the private experiences of Birmingham’s whites deviated from the public discourse. The *Brown* decision, the occasional protest by college students, and the Freedom Rides were all explained away as products of outside agitation. But with the spring demonstrations, Birmingham’s whites felt confused and angered by the recognition that local black men and women “were in revolt . . . no matter how often Birmingham blamed its problems on the outside agitators, it somehow sensed that those who went to jail were local Negroes, their Negroes.”³⁶

With the encouragement of the leaders of the demonstrations, children joined the protests. Fliers circulated around the city urging youngsters to “Fight for freedom first then go to school.”³⁷ The willingness on the part of African Americans young and old to choose jail over obedience flew in the face of white expectations. According to King, “jailing the Negro was once as much of a threat as the loss of job. To any Negro who

³⁴ Nichols “Cities Are What Men Make Them,” published interview with General John Persons.

³⁵ Ann Cochran to Senator Lister Hill, May 1963. Lister Hill Papers, Stanley Hoole Collections, University of Alabama.

³⁶ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 8’

³⁷ Claude Sitton, “Birmingham Jails 1,000 More Negroes Protesting Segregation,” 7 May 1963, *New York Times*.

displayed a spark of manhood, a southern law enforcement officer could say, ‘Nigger, watch your step or I’ll put you in jail.’”³⁸ White policemen, firefighters, and those men quickly deputized to help quell the demonstrations experienced the impotence of their threats – jail, dogs, and even high-power hoses could not keep their black neighbors off of the streets. In his reflections on the Movement, King considers moments of crises in which white men, accustomed to black accommodation, faced uncompromising black manhood. He expected that in that exchange, white officers would “feel defeated and ashamed” in the realization that he has lived his life oppressing his equal.³⁹ Leslie Dunbar, a white southern writer and politician echoed King’s suppositions about these powerful exchanges between white and black men in the streets, “Every Negro, therefore, who stands up as a man, though he stands up to us, is a gift to our manhood; and though for a little while we try to stare him down and force him down, we know in the bottoms of our hearts that his cool and appraising gaze is what we need. . . and in such moments of recognition, we realize that we live by an invisible sun within us, and that one of its names is justice.”⁴⁰

In Birmingham, in the spring of 1963, African-American activists turned jail, a weapon of the powerful and a symbol of black powerlessness into a badge of honor. In so doing, they communicated to the white community that southern black men, women, and children were no longer afraid. While King and Dunbar believed that the demonstrations moved whites to acknowledge equality in manhood, many of Birmingham’s whites raged against black men in their midst who were no longer

³⁸ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 15.

³⁹ King, *Why We Can’t Wait*, 15.

⁴⁰ Leslie Dunbar, *The Shame of Southern Politicians* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

controlled by fear and brutality. Reverend Shuttlesworth announced the new black man in Birmingham through his communication with the black, not white, community. To the Uncle Tom's, Shuttlesworth screamed: "Find your crack and hide."⁴¹

Toward the end of April, activists began to refer to the growing protests as "The Children's Crusade." On April 26, 1963, three days after Mayor Boutwell and the nine new city council members pledged the oath of office in "stormy Birmingham," President Kennedy dispatched Burke Marshall to work with the new government to bring an end to what appeared to be an impasse.⁴² Between Marshall's arrival and the May 8 truce, demonstrations overwhelmed the city. On May 3, faced with thousands of marching youngsters, Bull Connor called in the K-9 troops and ordered his men to unleash fire hoses on the children and teenagers. In the coming days, Connor turned the city of Birmingham into a police state, moving through the downtown area, ordering his policemen, state troopers, and deputized "irregular" forces to "get the niggers off of the streets." After hearing that Shuttlesworth had been hit and injured by a fire hose, Connor lamented, "I waited a week to see Shuttlesworth get hit with a hose. I'm sorry that I missed that. I wish that they had carried him away in a hearse."⁴³ On the morning of May 6, 1963, once again, three thousand marchers poured into the business district to sing and pray. Connor gave the signal for the Birmingham police to turn on high-powered fire hoses to disperse the demonstrators. By late afternoon, 867 protestors had been sent to jail bringing the total to more than 2,200.⁴⁴

41 Statement by Fred Shuttlesworth, April 1963, Shuttlesworth Papers, Box 4, King Center,

42 "Stormy Birmingham Gets New Mayor," *Christian Science Monitor*, 16 April 1963, 2.

43 "Insistent Integrationist," *New York Times*, 11 May 1963, 8.

44 "Birmingham Negroes Halt March on Jail," *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 May 1963.

“It’s a Dollar and Cents Thing”: The Business Community Negotiates

By May 7, nearly five weeks after the demonstrations had begun, the business community finally relented. While hoses held back thousands of protesters and fire engines screamed through the streets, the city’s financial leaders met in an emergency session. Looking out of the windows of the Chamber of Commerce, they saw “a veritable sea of black faces and realized that the black community, which had been complacent for so long, would not rest until their goals were granted.”⁴⁵ Sidney Smyer and David Vann secured “a group of local Negro leaders who could discuss settlement.”⁴⁶ Mayor-elect Boutwell, members of the new City Council, and the Senior Citizens Committee, namely the Birmingham’s top corporate and business leaders, met with the leaders of Birmingham’s black community to pull their “city back from the brink of a racial explosion.”⁴⁷ The men in attendance represented a broad swath of Birmingham’s upper echelon, business owners, bankers, and industrial leaders came to the meeting to hammer out a solution for their city. These men reportedly employed 75 percent of the city’s workers and their fortunes depended on the image of their city.⁴⁸ The top executives of such companies U.S. Steel Corporation’s Tennessee, Coal, and Iron division (the largest employer in area), Alabama Power Company, First National Bank of Birmingham, Vulcan Materials Company, and Woodward Iron Company comprised the Committee. In the 1950s, this group of men was known as the “Big Mules” of Birmingham. In the 1960s, they were the Senior Citizens Committee. It was

⁴⁵ Nichols, “Cities Are What Men Make Them,” 293, published interview with David Vann.

⁴⁶ “Outline of Negotiations” May 1963, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 4.

⁴⁷ Hendrick Smith, “Leaders Pressing Birmingham Talk,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1963, 29.

⁴⁸ Robert E. Baker “Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition,” 20 May 1963 *Washington Post*, A2.

their name, not their motives, which had changed.⁴⁹ When asked about the negotiations, Sid Smyer replied simply, “It’s a dollar and cents thing.”⁵⁰

Assistant Attorney General Burke Marshall oversaw the meeting, frequently phoning Washington to report the progress of a compromise as well as calling the black community leaders to assist in a truce.⁵¹ The meeting was touted as one which both economic and moral motivations: “The unofficial leadership of Birmingham, its merchants, industrialists, and professional men have been increasingly concerned for the city’s future . . . the agreement, achieved under pressure of the demonstrations and yet voluntarily, to improve job opportunities in some of the stores, to desegregate some of the lunch counters, and to improve the very unreliable lines of communication between the races.”⁵² After devoting years to the preservation of white supremacy and segregation, the members of Senior Citizens Committee erased their culpability in Birmingham’s harsh racial order when they relented to King’s and Shuttlesworth’s demands – demands aimed only at them.

On Friday, May 9, a white man emerged from a meeting and announced, “Well, we’ve reached an agreement. I hope to God it sticks.”⁵³ Both sides agreed to a four-point limited desegregation plan which included plans to desegregate all store facilities

49 Baker “Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition,” A2.

50 Dan Carter, *George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

51 Hendrick Smith “Leaders Pressing Birmingham Talk,” *New York Times*, 8 May 1963, 29. When asked about the decision to take part in the meeting. Sid Smyer – a prominent member of the American State’s Rights Party replied, “It’s a dollar and cents thing.”

52 “Bombs in Birmingham,” *Washington Post*, 13 May 1963, A14.

53 Al Kuettnner, “How Courageous Businessmen Saved Day in Birmingham, South’s Racial Powder,” *New York Times*, 18 May 1963, 19.

including lunch counters and dressing rooms, each downtown department store promised to hire at least one black clerk, the city would drop charges against those men, women, and children in jail, and a biracial committee would come together to work toward the hiring of black policemen and the desegregation of schools and parks.⁵⁴

Two days later, in the early morning of Saturday, May 11, two bombs rocked Birmingham. The first exploded the home of Reverend A.D. King, Martin Luther King's younger brother while the second bomb tore a hole through the A.G. Gaston motel half a block away – no one was killed. The leaders of SCLC and the local movement used both locations for meetings and retreat throughout the demonstrations. Following the blasts, riots engulfed the outskirts of Birmingham's business district. One police officer was stabbed in the back by a rioter while two others were struck by missiles. African Americans flooded the streets, throwing bottles, bricks, gravel, and rocks at the passing police cars in what was reported as "one of the worst racial explosions that the South has seen in years."⁵⁵ Alabama Highway Patrolmen rushed onto the scene to reinforce the Birmingham police. Connor's armored riot car and police dogs worked long into the night to disperse the crowds. Rev. Walker came out into the streets to encourage the crowds to go home but they refused.⁵⁶

Mayor Hanes blamed the violence on the white businessmen, the "quisling, gutless traitors" who should have known better than to make a compromise with the

⁵⁴ "Outline of Negotiations" May 1963, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 4

⁵⁵ Hedrick Smith, "Bombs Touch Off Widespread Riot at Birmingham," *New York Times*, 12 May 1963, 1.

⁵⁶ Smith, "Bombs Touch Off Widespread Riot at Birmingham," 1.

black community in Birmingham.⁵⁷ By May 15, 3,000 combat-ready state patrolmen stood within striking distance in the event of new outbreaks of major violence.⁵⁸ Armed with carbines and steel helmets with little Confederate flag insignias, Wallace's state troopers remained an ever-present force in Birmingham from the bombings of the Gaston Motel through December 1963.⁵⁹ Outsiders blamed city, state, and church officials for allowing the strong-arm tactics of whites against blacks to continue unimpeded in Birmingham for so many years.⁶⁰ On the street, however, many Birmingham whites commented on the lack of white-on-black violence in the streets. Not only did the police men keep their dogs leashed, but white extremists remained home as black rioters engulfed much of the city.⁶¹ "There is the frequently expressed pride, perhaps with a touch of surprise that no white mobs gathered during the five weeks of Negro demonstrations or during the riot of last Saturday night" reported one visiting newspaperman.⁶² A fund was established by the city to reward any information regarding the bombing and many pledged money. The YMBC pledged \$250, "a divesture of guilt, a balm for the city's conscience," according to Charles Morgan.⁶³

⁵⁷ James C. Tanner, "Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South's Economic Rise", *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963, 1.

⁵⁸ "Scattered Violence Troubles Birmingham," 15 May 1963, *Christian Science Monitor*, 6.

⁵⁹ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 7.

⁶⁰ "Bunche Blames Whites for Birmingham Riots," *Chicago Daily Defender* 20 May 1963, 4.

⁶¹ Robert E. Baker "Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition: "New City" Seen Emerging," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1963, A2.

⁶² Robert E. Baker "Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition: "New City" Seen Emerging," *Washington Post*, 20 May 1963, A2.

⁶³ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 8.

The press responded with profuse sympathy for the business leaders who had worked diligently for peace. Newspapermen heralded their efforts: 'The businessmen have been far ahead of the politicians in their ability to read the future consequences of the old traditions and to recognize the necessity for change.'⁶⁴ William Engel, a Birmingham Realtor and member of the Senior Citizens Committee, embraced the role of southern savior: "The politicians have failed. Now it's the businessman who holds the last hope for the South."⁶⁵ Many of the members of the Senior Citizens Committee were the individuals who had, only a few years earlier, committed themselves to white supremacy and had worked to create intransigent systems of segregation were now praised as the courageous southern moderates. Sydney Smyer was one of the principal organizers of the American States Rights Party and Mayor Boutwell was the principal architect of the Pupil Placement Act, a plan to duck racial integration in Jefferson County's Public Schools. So many of these men worked for white supremacy and white control until it began to affect their bottom line. The numbers reported in the downtown business district could not be ignored. One restaurant owner in Birmingham reported that his business has fallen twenty-five percent since the latest outbreak of racial strife began on April 3. The latest Federal Reserve Bank report revealed that department store sales dropped ten percent below the year-earlier level in the four weeks ended May 4, 1963.⁶⁶ These were the more conservative numbers of the day. The state revenue department records for Jefferson County revealed that there had been a drop

⁶⁴ "Bombs in Birmingham" *Washington Post*, 13 May 1963, A14.

⁶⁵ James C. Tanner, "Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South's Economic Rise," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963, 1.

⁶⁶ James C. Tanner, "Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South's Economic Rise," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963, 1.

in consumer sales from years previous by \$1,765,400 for the month of April.⁶⁷ The drop in local sales was not the only problem for business in Birmingham. The city's businessmen also faced the prospect of losing all new investments in the industrial economy. John Williams, head of sales consultant firm in Birmingham reported: 'We've become known as a city of reaction, rebellion, and riot . . . because of that we're not gaining industry as fast we should. A businessman who sees and heard of the racial strife here can't ignore it when he's thinking of locating a plant.' "Would you take an industry into a place where Bull Connor was police commissioner?" asked another Birmingham businessman.⁶⁸

The Changing Image of Birmingham's White Businessmen

Their business acumen, however, was not the story that carried the day. The headline in papers across the country reported the emergence of a new type of Birmingham man, one who was going to save the city and, possibly, the South. Reporters described this unnamed man, time and time again, through the weeks and months following the truce. He was moderate, used judgment over force, moved slowly but carefully and appeared to be a true southern gentleman. "The southern businessman is gingerly coming forward and taking the initiative," reported the *Wall Street Journal*. His "slow and cautious" entrance onto the "segregation scene in the long run may represent one of the most significant developments in Dixie race relations since the Negro began his organized efforts to attain expanded civil rights more than a decade ago . . . the businessman could wield the balance of power between the

⁶⁷ AL Kuettner, "How Courageous Businessmen Saved Day in Birmingham, South's Racial Powder," *New York Times*, 18 May 1963, 19.

⁶⁸ AL Kuettner, "How Courageous Businessmen Saved Day in Birmingham, South's Racial Powder," *New York Times*, 18 May 1963, 19.

segregationist extremists on one hand and the “teachers and preachers” who up to now have been the backbone of the white moderates.”⁶⁹ The Big Mules and business class, who had created, maintained, and profited from racial inequity and Birmingham’s “race wage” were now referred to as “the responsible whites” who “were nurturing the growing feeling that Birmingham was maturing and would pull through.”⁷⁰

The white businessman in Birmingham appeared as a reluctant savior, coming down from Red Mountain to rescue the city from itself. The “courageous businessmen” sought a solution to pull back their city from the brink of a race riot.⁷¹ The press and the businessmen themselves cultivated a certain persona – the modern southern gentleman: a quiet leader who with move the city beyond its ugly past with a steady hand and mind.⁷² On the other side of Birmingham’s crucible, a new man emerged, one who had consciously and carefully distanced himself from the rabble. Not only did the white-collared man represent the advent of a more moderate South, his image also served to make obsolete his collusion in Birmingham’s racial violence.

On May 23, 1963, Birmingham’s school board expelled all of the school children who had missed classes to participate in the demonstrations, effectively ousting eleven hundred children from the county school system. Outsiders interpreted the massive dismissal as pure provocation, “It is a piece of social sabotage – it’s effect, if not its aim

⁶⁹ James C. Tanner, “Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South’s Economic Rise”, *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1963, 1.

⁷⁰ Robert E. Baker “Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition: “New City” Seen Emerging,” *Washington Post*, 20 May 1963, A2.

⁷¹ Al Kuettnner, “How Courageous Businessmen Saved Day in Birmingham, South’s Racial Powder,” *New York Times*, 18 May 1963, 19.

⁷² “Three G’s. Four G’s, Five G’s,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 22 May 1963, 16 “The business leaders in Birmingham are quietly pressing their compromise . . . when a steady hand and mind are needed.”

– is to unsettle the tentative settlement of racial strife...the action was taken by a School Board and a school Superintendent under the direct jurisdiction of Connor.”⁷³ Following the bombs in Birmingham, the riots, the wry comments made to outside reporters parodying the city slogan – “It’s nice to bomb you in Havingham,” tensions ran high across the city. Synagogues were bathed in light, two mayors and two governments claimed control over the mayhem, and Connor’s school board stepped in to stir the pot.⁷⁴ As noted by one outside newspaperman, “This is Birmingham’s trying period of transition.”⁷⁵

Some white Alabamian leaders denounced the compromise. In a statement to the press, Governor George C. Wallace declared: “I know of no meeting with businessmen and Negro leaders. There may be a meeting but I as Governor have no part of such meeting and will not be a party to any meeting to compromise on the issues of segregation...and I wish to commend Bull Connor and his forces upon their handling of the matter to date.”⁷⁶ One point of contention among many outside of the meeting was the anonymity of those who chose to hammer out a solution on behalf of the entire city. Robert Shelton, Imperial Wizard of the KKK, exploited class resentment over racial resentment in his invitation to a rally in Birmingham in 1963, stating that the city needed real men, not “men, sun crowned, who live above the fog, with their large professions and their little deeds.” Noting the hypocrisy of the men who worked on the compromise,

⁷³ “Social Sabotage” *Washington Post*, 23 May 1963, A22.

⁷⁴ Robert E. Baker “Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition” 20 May 1963 *Washington Post*, A2.

⁷⁵ Robert E. Baker, “Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition,” A2.

⁷⁶ William E. Blundell, “Dixie Diehards: All-Out Segregationists Vow No Retreat Despite New Negro Militancy,” *Wall Street Journal*, 23 May 1963, 1.

Shelton asked for men “who can damn the treacherous flatteries of the demagogue without winking.”⁷⁷ In a radio address responding to the secret negotiations, Commissioner Connor revealed the precarious position of the downtown business owners: “The white people and other people of this city should not go in these stores. That’s the best way I know to beat down integration in Birmingham.” Connor exhorted the merchants to “have enough backbone to come out” and identify themselves.⁷⁸ A top executive at one of Birmingham’s banks seconded Connor’s threat, “The first store to put in a Negro clerk is going to find out what a real boycott is like. For every Negro customer he gets, he’ll lose 10 whites.”⁷⁹ At a Ku Klux Klan rally, while the negotiations continued, the members were urged to turn in credit cards for all stores whose management took part in the meetings.⁸⁰ The National State’s Rights Party vowed to create a list of store managers who agreed to integrate their staff and their facilities, a list replete with name, address, and telephone numbers which they promised to freely distributed on the streets of downtown Birmingham.⁸¹

On the day that the order of expulsion came down, the Alabama Supreme Court overruled the the City Commissioners’ challenge to remain in office through their term. Mayor Boutwell, expressing, “calm intelligence and good will,” and the new councilmen

⁷⁷ “An Invitation from Robert Shelton” 1963, Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box 6, BPLAD.

⁷⁸ Smith, “Bombs Touch Off Widespread Riot at Birmingham,” 1.

⁷⁹ Blundell, “Dixie Diehards: All-Out Segregationists Vow No Retreat Despite New Negro Militancy,” 1.

⁸⁰ Tanner, “Dixie Businessmen: Executives Seek Racial Amity as Clashes Peril South’s Economic Rise,” 1.

⁸¹ William E. Blundell, “Dixie Diehards: All-Out Segregationists Vow No Retreat Despite New Negro Militancy,” 1.

were finally able to officially take office and govern city affairs.⁸² After collecting his personal papers from his office, ex-Mayor Hanes told the media that he was returning home to “catch up with my yard work.” Connor received word of the decision while on the street with his policemen. Newsmen followed him to his office where he removed his belongings, including a “hard hat” inscribed “Bull Connor, battle of Ingram Park, 1963” and went home.⁸³

On the afternoon of May 23, Mayor Albert Boutwell entered office. He ordered the schools to open their doors to the expelled children and openly stated that he would be willing to speak to “any local Negro who wanted to see him.”⁸⁴ “Peace hopes rise” as one newspaperman described the local and national reaction to Boutwell’s position.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, difficult times lay ahead for the city. Within two weeks, a federal court ordered the desegregation of Birmingham’s public schools and everyone in the city wondered about Boutwell’s unspoken commitment to white supremacy. Just as the city looked as though it might turn a corner, residents sweltering in the humid, ninety degree heat opined that it was going to be a long, hot summer.⁸⁶

The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing and the Blame

Without Connor, Birmingham’s extremists continued to fight for racial segregation. Although the discourse of restraint and moderation characterized much of the new Birmingham, staunch segregationists remained undeterred. Between March and

⁸² “Post Article says aloud what Birmingham Whispers” *Birmingham News*, 20 May 1963, 1.

⁸³ Claude Sitton, “Boutwell Seated in Birmingham: Peace Hopes Rise” *New York Times*, 23 May 1963, 1.

⁸⁴ Sitton, “Boutwell Seated in Birmingham: Peace Hopes Rise,” 1.

⁸⁵ Sitton, “Boutwell Seated in Birmingham: Peace Hopes Rise,” 1.

⁸⁶ Baker “Uneasy Birmingham Undergoes Transition: “New City” Seen Emerging,” A2.

September of 1963, white supremacists bombed five African-American homes. The bombs went unsolved and the entire white community remained silent.⁸⁷ In addition, the downtown department stores had not honored their promises to hire black store clerks and the city failed to make progress toward an integrated police force.⁸⁸

As the moderate forces in Birmingham failed to honor all of their promises from the spring, other men in the city moved forward with their plans. The United Americans for Conservative Government, the Citizens Council of Alabama, and the Ku Klux Klan stepped up their campaigns in Birmingham in the summer of 1963. The most active group was the National States Rights Party (NSRP). Dr. Edward Fields, founder of the NSRP, organized an anti-integration rally almost every week with an attendance rate between of 150 and 300 men and women. School desegregation in the fall loomed large at these meetings and Dr. Fields advocated “fighting in the streets” before racial integration came to Birmingham’s schools.⁸⁹ According to Fields, the “assimilation of races [was] a forerunner of mongrelization.”⁹⁰ The NSRP planned a motorcade leading up to the first day of school in an attempt to rally support and keep white children out of integrated schools.⁹¹ On Wednesday, September 4, 1963, white demonstrators waving Confederate flags and chanting “two, four, six, eight, we don’t want to integrate”

⁸⁷ “Bombing is 21st at Birmingham” *New York Times*, 16 September 1963, 26.

⁸⁸ ACHMR and SCLC Pamphlet, “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work: Merchants Failed Again” September, 1963 William Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box 4.

⁸⁹ Memoranda from Lieutenant T.H. Cook to Chief of Police Jamie Moore and William Hamilton, 1 July 1963, Detectives attended seemingly every meeting and rally of the NSRP, the White Citizen’s Council, and ACMHR during the summer of 1963, Hamilton Papers, Box 265, Folder 3, File 35A. BPLAD.

⁹⁰ Memoranda to Chief of Police Jamie Moore and William Hamilton, 30 August 1963, Hamilton Papers, Box 265, Folder 3, File 35A, BPLAD.

⁹¹ Notes on conversation between William Hamilton and Mayor Boutwell regarding Field’s plans to organize a motorcade, September 1962, Hamilton Papers, Box 265, Folder 3, File 35A. BPLAD.

gathered outside of Graymont Elementary school to express their opposition to school integration in Birmingham.⁹² Graymont Elementary, Ramsay High School and West End High School were to be integrated in the upcoming week and Birmingham teetered on the edge of violence. Rather than urging peace, Governor Wallace and Albert Boutwell came out in support of a private school endeavor in West End.⁹³

In response to the rising tension, Fred Shuttlesworth circulated a paper urging “calmness and restraint.” Asking Birmingham to remember that “true brotherhood means being concerned about life, living, peace, and happiness,” Shuttlesworth hoped that peace would last through the tense first days of desegregation which was to begin the following week.⁹⁴ Rather than urging his citizens to comply and peacefully accept school integration, Mayor Boutwell sought a court order to postpone the token integration. His efforts failed and on Wednesday, September 11, black children attended Ramsay and West High Schools and Graymont Elementary, three of Birmingham’s previously all-white schools. Integration took place without major incident.

Just four days later, in the early hours of Sunday, September 15, 1963, Robert “Dynamite Bob” Chambliss, a Ku Klux Klan member in Birmingham, Alabama planted 122 sticks of dynamite in the basement of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, a local African-American church which served as a meeting place for activists during the demonstrations earlier that spring. At 10:26 on Sunday morning, as families were

⁹² John Herbers, “White Birmingham 4th Graders Back Negroes in Class Themes,” 8 September 1963, *New York Times*, 25.

⁹³ Radio message plea from Wallace in Birmingham to contribute to the private school endeavor in West End, Letter from Boutwell to Marshall, Marshall Papers, Collection 300, Box 2, File 6, BPLAD.

⁹⁴ “A Call for Calmness and Restraint - ACMHR” 6 September 1963, The present challenge to all Birmingham Citizens is to “be kindly affectionate one to another with Brotherly Love,” to “recompense to no man evil for evil” and to “overcome evil with good.” (Romans) This is the time to believe the Bible we read, practice the religion we profess, and honor the Fathers who founded our nation.” Distributed by ACMHR, Shuttlesworth Papers, Box 1, King Center.

seated in their church pews and Sunday school children filed down to the basement to reassemble for closing prayers, the dynamite exploded. Four young girls, Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Addie Mae Collins, and Carole Robertson died. The bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was the fiftieth bombing in Birmingham in since World War II and the fourth in four weeks, none of which had been solved.⁹⁵ In the hours following the church bombing, two young white men coming from a NSRP meeting, riding a scooter on the outskirts of Birmingham, shot and killed Virgil Ware, a thirteen-year-old African-American boy for “apparently no reason at all.”⁹⁶ That afternoon, a Birmingham Police patrolman raised his shotgun from his car window and killed sixteen-year-old Johnnie Robinson, a young African American who was throwing rocks at cars full of white youths driving through the streets with Confederate battle flags.⁹⁷ Robinson was fleeing the scene when a patrolman fired a buck shot, hitting the young man in the back. Fires blazed throughout the black sections of the city, riots flared, and Mayor Boutwell appeared on television to beg his citizens for an end to “this senseless reign of terror.”⁹⁸ Because of the chaos, the NSPR cancelled a scheduled

⁹⁵ CDD, September 16, 63, “Racists Bomb Birmingham Church, 6 Kids Die,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 16 September 1963, A3; Claude Sitton, “Birmingham Bomb Kills Four Negro Girls in Church; Riots Flare; 2 Boys Slain,” *The New York Times*, September 16, 1963, 1.

⁹⁶ Sitton, “Birmingham Bomb Kills Four Negro Girls in Church; Riots Flare; 2 Boys Slain,” 1.

⁹⁷ Accounts of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and the ensuing violence come from Elizabeth H. Cobbs, Petric J. Smith, *A Long Time Coming: An Insider's Story of the Birmingham Church Bombing that Rocked the World* (Birmingham: Carne Hill Publishers) 1994, Ray Jenkins, “Birmingham Wrestles with Race Tension” *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 1963, 1; “Alabama Church Bombing Barbaric: Dr. King,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 16 September 1963, A3; “The Blame and Beyond,” *New York Times*, 17 September 1963, 34; Sitton, “Birmingham Bomb Kills Four Negro Girls in Church; Riots Flare; 2 Boys Slain,” 1.

⁹⁸ Sitton, “Birmingham Bomb Kills Four Negro Girls in Church; Riots Flare; 2 Boys Slain,” 1.

motorcade of over 1,000 white residents protesting school integration as groups of white men and women gathered for an afternoon march through Birmingham's downtown.⁹⁹

At noon the following day, September 16, the city was to have a communal moment of silence for the grief-stricken families. A tearful Mayor Boutwell and Chief of Police Jamie Moore, appeared on local television the previous evening to call for calm and community prayer, "Wherever you may be noon tomorrow, stop for a moment to bow your head in prayer during this hour of grief for our community and its people."¹⁰⁰ At noon, when Birmingham's men and women mourned for the families who had to bury their children, music from the carillons high atop the downtown Protective Life Building commenced and wafted through the shocked city. The carillons chimed out the tune to "Dixie."¹⁰¹ Birmingham appeared unchanged.

That morning, Charles Morgan woke early to draft a speech for his meeting with the Young Men's Business Club. He rose before daybreak and drove into the city to put down his thoughts before the meeting. He scribbled down notes rife with anger, despair, empathy, and "final intolerance."¹⁰² As he walked to the downtown meeting, the young attorney absorbed his city with new eyes and ears. He noticed every symbol of hatred and conflict which infiltrated Birmingham and he came to an exhausting realization – Birmingham was not going to change. He passed vacant storefronts of shops forced close after the spring boycotts – business owners lost money from a black boycott and then from a white one when merchants acquiesced to black demands. State troopers, a

⁹⁹ "Bomb Negro Church; 4 Die" *Chicago Tribune*, 16 September 1963, 1.

¹⁰⁰ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 4.

¹⁰² Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 165.

recent force in Birmingham, walked the streets in their shiny new helmets upon which Governor Wallace embossed with an insignia of the Confederate flag. Morgan reached the Redmont Hotel at noon with his speech in his pocket and walked in.¹⁰³

Standing after many club members maligned outside agitators and the hostile national press, Morgan began to speak. “Four little girls were killed in Birmingham yesterday. A mad, remorseful, worried community asks, ‘Who did it? Who threw that bomb?’” Throughout the rest of his speech, Morgan answered his question: “We all did it. Every last one of us is condemned for that crime . . . it is every senator and every representative who stands and with mock humility tells the world that things back home aren’t really like they are. It is the coward in all of who clucks admonitions . . . we are a mass of intolerance and bigotry and stand indicted before our young . . . And who is really guilty? Each of us . . . Birmingham is not a dying city. It is dead.” The Young Men’s Business Club greeted Morgan’s speech with applause and one member suggested that they admit a black member. Those gathered met the motion with silence. Soon after, the meeting was adjourned; the men filed out of The Redmont to the tune of Dixie on the carillons, got into their cars, and drove back over-the-mountain.¹⁰⁴ Remembering the CBS special following the Freedom Rides, “Who Speaks for Birmingham,” Morgan writes, “No one could speak for Birmingham. But then, the city was not looking for a spokesman. It was looking for a scapegoat.”¹⁰⁵

Whites in Birmingham joined Morgan in his effort to stop the displacement of blame across the city. While those parents around West End and Graymont redirected

¹⁰³ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 1-14.

¹⁰⁴ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 1-14.

¹⁰⁵ Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 165.

their attention on school segregation following the murders, many remained outraged at themselves and their city. To Mayor Boutwell, Betty Fowler confessed her shame. "I know by my silence that I am condoning the acts of the verbose extremist."¹⁰⁶ Norman Jimerson, the director of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, publicly stated that the violence will continue until we humbly admit before God that we share a common guilt with those who commit the violence."¹⁰⁷ Dr. Abe Siegles confessed his shame in a letter explaining why he removed a Jim Crow sign to hospital administrators, "This sign which glares at me as I enter and leave my office has become so intolerable that I had to remove it." The recent event "which took the lives of innocent children" reminded him of his "failure as a citizen and the failure of this institution of higher learning to exert a constructive influence in our community."¹⁰⁸

Outside politicians urged the leaders of Birmingham to assume responsibility, "to speak openly and forcefully against the madness which has swept" the city, "a madness which was allowed to take root and grow by their silence."¹⁰⁹ The murder of children, was "not committed by mere bigots from the backwoods alone . . . those public officials and leading citizens who set the standard of violent behavior . . . by words and actions as well as by silence, created a receptive atmosphere for the horrible crimes."¹¹⁰

Alabama and Birmingham's leaders have "pandered to the worst instead of appealing to

¹⁰⁶ Betty Fowler to Mayor Albert Boutwell, 23 September 1963, Boutwell Papers, Collection 264, Box 11, File 3, BPLAD.

¹⁰⁷ Norman Jimerson as quoted in Ray Jenkins, "Birmingham Wrestles with Race Tension" *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 1963, 1.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Abe Siegles, University of Alabama in Birmingham Archives, as reported by Kaye Cochran Nail, Birmingham researcher in letter to author, 8 October 2009.

¹⁰⁹ "Church Council Will Aid Families of Bomb Victims," *Christian Times*, 16 September 1963, 2.

¹¹⁰ "The Blame – And Beyond," 17 September 1963, *New York Times*, 34.

the best in Alabamians.”¹¹¹ One writer noted, even as Mayor Boutwell sheds tears over the murder of innocent children, “he shares in the culpability. Just the other day he sought, unsuccessfully, a court order to postpone even the token school desegregation.”¹¹² Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota blamed the moneyed and empowered men in Alabama. In front of the Senate, Humphrey declared that the men who control banks, factories, and the news media, the “Southern establishment” controls the South and her politicians with their deep pockets.¹¹³ “And so – for profit,” declared Humphrey, “for money – the whirlwind of racial hatred and violence has been encouraged - not permitted – but encouraged, invited, yes, incited.”¹¹⁴ Georgia Representative Charles Weltner blamed the southern moderate, a group in which he was a member: “We have stood by, leaving the field to reckless and violent men,” Weltner proclaimed. The murders in Birmingham took place because “those whose task it is to speak have stood mute.”¹¹⁵

The Atlanta-based civil rights activist group, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), looked outside of the South for the culprits. On September 18, SNCC circulated a list of the ten largest companies in Birmingham, all of which were headquartered in the North, to argue that greedy northern industrialists established and promoted racial segregation in Birmingham and across the South. The companies listed, including U.S. Steel and U.S. Pipe and Foundry Company employed over 35

¹¹¹ “Reaping the Whirlwind,” *The Washington Post Herald*, 17 September 1963, A12.

¹¹² “Reaping the Whirlwind,” *The Washington Post Herald*, 17 September 1963, A12.

¹¹³ “Day of Mourning Urged” 18 September 1963, *New York Times*, 27.

¹¹⁴ “Day of Mourning Urged” 18 September 1963, *New York Times*, 27.

¹¹⁵ “Mourning of Bomb Victims Asked; Representative Blames Moderates” *Washington Post*, 18 September 1963, A5.

percent of Birmingham's manufacturer workers ignored or encouraged the "It was not the lower-class whites who directed Birmingham's racial policies . . . these industrialists, by the silence and inaction are supporting the killing of innocent children."¹¹⁶ Eugene Patterson, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, took his turn to place blame for the death of the four young girls in his regular Monday column. He, too, refused to blame the individual who planted the bomb. Instead, he blamed all of the white South: "We broke those children's bodies . . . we, who stand in imagined rectitude and let the mad dogs that run wild in every society slide their leashes from our hand . . . we, who resented the necessary, rationalized the unacceptable, and created the day surely when these children would die."¹¹⁷ In a moving description of a mother standing in front of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, holding in her hand the shoe of her dead child, Patterson wrote: "Every one of us in the white South holds that small shoe in his hand . . . let us see it straight. Let us compare it with . . . the spectacle of shrilling children whose parents and teachers turned them free to spit epithets at small huddles of Negro school children for a week before this Sunday in Birmingham."¹¹⁸ The steel town became the symbol for everything which was wrong with the South. Birmingham's hate mongers were more evil, their moderates, weaker, and their elite, greedier, than the rest of the region.

Nine days after Chambliss planted the dynamite, in the early morning of September 25, 1963, two bombs exploded on a neighborhood street in a black

¹¹⁶ Fred Powledge, "Rights Demonstration in North Sought Against 10 Companies," 18 September 1963, *New York Times*, 26.

¹¹⁷ "Southern Editor Writes Apology, a Flower for the Graves," *Washington Post*, 18 September 1963, A6.

¹¹⁸ Southern Editor Writes Apology, a Flower for the Graves," *Washington Post*, 18 September 1963, A6.

residential area in downtown Birmingham which damaged at least eight homes.

According to Shuttlesworth, the first bomb was exploded for the purpose of attracting a large crowd in the bomb area, the “metal which was intended for hundreds of persons blasted through these homes as if they were cardboard boxes.”¹¹⁹ The second bomb, which went off about an hour later, targeted any spectators who gathered around the area of the first explosion. Shuttlesworth sent out a pamphlet which instructed men, women, and children what to do in the case of a bomb – “take cover in a ditch” or “lie flat on the floor.” Birmingham’s African Americans continued to be at the mercy of Birmingham’s most despicable men. Alex and Co. Insurance, “the largest carrier of Nero risks” withdrew their business from Birmingham “due to the unsettled condition” of the city.¹²⁰

Pagan Savages, Young Beatniks, and White Mothers

The church bombing did not deter Birmingham’s violent white supremacists. The culprits remained at large and school desegregation continued unabated. In the Graymont and West End school areas, parents joined together to raise money for private schools. Pleading for money from Senators Lister Hill and John Sparkman, as well as Mayor Boutwell, the Graymont Parents for Private School and West End Parents for Private School threatened that integration “seriously disturbs the mothers of children going to these schools.”¹²¹ Boutwell responded to the white parents with his support,

¹¹⁹ Pamphlet distributed by ACMHR, 25 September 1963, Shuttlesworth Papers, Box 1, King Center.

¹²⁰ John J. Drew to Burke Marshall, 20 September 1963, Marshall Papers, Collection 300, Box 2, BPLAD.

¹²¹ John Stanton of Graymont Parents for Private Schools to Lister Hill, October 1963, Lister Hill Papers, William Stanley Hoole Special Collections, Tuscaloosa.

buoying their resolve to keep Birmingham white.¹²² The United Americans for Conservative Government in Birmingham distributed pamphlets which informed the parents of integrated schools that they could legally pull their child out of school while the ASRA distributed a list of supposed crimes which had taken place at integrated schools in Alabama. Entitled, "WHILE YOU SLEEP," the three-page pamphlet most consistently reported "vulgar approaches of Negro boys" toward their white, female schoolmates and the disruption of southern heritage in "our schools," which included the outlawing of the Confederate Flag and "Dixie."¹²³ The discourse of female victimhood characterized the opposition to school integration. "As a red blooded and white American man," one letter urged Senator, "stand up . . . think of the danger (of integration) to our white people, especially our female population. Look around you Sir, what you see happening to our white female, raped, ravaged, mugged . . . at the hands of these pagan savages."¹²⁴ Women used female victimhood to induce their leaders to stand against integration as well, reporting that in Birmingham, it is not uncommon in the middle of the night to "see a big, black face peering in one's window" or "of Negroes wearing razor blades in the toes of their shoes and kicking the heels of white women."¹²⁵

While white women were at risk when schools integrated, communism threatened young, white men. Anxiety over communism and youth came to the fore in Birmingham

¹²² Graymont Parents for Private Schools Literature, October 1963, Boutwell Papers, Collection 264, Box 12, File 2, BPLAD.

¹²³ Undated Pamphlet, American States' Rights Party Papers, Collection 416, Box 1, File 3, BPLAD.

¹²⁴ Robert H. Hill to Lister Hill, June 5, 1963, Lister Hill Papers, WSHSC.

¹²⁵ Miss Marilyn Hodges to Lister Hill, 12 June 1963, Lister Hill Papers, WSHSC.

in the fall of 1963, as well.¹²⁶ Always a suspicion that Dr. King and racial liberals were spreading communism in the South, with the desegregation of schools, the fear grew. Founded in Birmingham in 1955, the General John G. Forney Historical Society warned city residents and political representatives that the “international plan to conquer the United States . . . is no secret and youth is the target.” Urging parents and teachers to practice religion and the “old-fashioned rituals of family living and parental authority,” to keep their children safe from communism, the society also encouraged sports because “athletes are seldom beatniks.”¹²⁷ City leaders began to advocate tougher, more active young men to combat Birmingham’s young men who threatened to abandon “love of country and fear of God.”¹²⁸ Shades Valley High School endured a communism scare the previous fall when a group of “extreme liberals who call themselves “free thinkers” fell under suspicion after a fellow female classmate charged that the group was communist. The principal at Shades Valley stated that “such organizations exist in every school in the area” but if any subversive action crops up at his school, the reaction would be “severe and we won’t be soft.”¹²⁹ In the years to come, the fear of Communism in Birmingham would direct the requisites of young, white manhood. Beginning in 1963, the Forney Society labeled pornography as part of the Communist agenda and by 1964, City Councilman George Siebels suggested that a group of

¹²⁶ For an analysis of the links between masculinity and anti-Communism, see K.A. Courdileone, “Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960” *The Journal of American History* 87, Vol 2 (September 2000) 515-545.

¹²⁷ “A Word to Teachers and Parents” The General John G. Forney Historical Society, 18 November 1963. Lister Hill Papers, WSHSC.

¹²⁸ “A Word to Teachers and Parents” The General John G. Forney Historical Society, 18 November 1963. Lister Hill Papers, WSHSC.

¹²⁹ “Commie Activities Charges Probed at Shades Valley High,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, 18 September 1962, 4.

Birmingham women find and rid the city of such filth.¹³⁰ By the spring of 1963, City Council members began a campaign to encourage athleticism, Christian morality, and “super patriotism” among Birmingham’s male youth.

Conclusion

Poor, southern men “roar the hate that his betters only whisper and then die at their hands in a near-mythic purgation of the race” writes historian Allison Graham in her study of Hollywood’s treatment of the civil rights South.¹³¹ In her examinations of the masculine representations in Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Graham argues that Atticus Finch and Bob Ewell symbolize the alignment of class and racial enlightenment in Alabama. Bob Ewell, “whose face was as red as his neck,” existed in Alabama’s rough edges as a symbol of violence, racism, and poverty.¹³² Ewell’s overalls signified the ignorance of the working poor and serve as a contrast to the tolerance, goodness, and intelligence of the white shirt and suit of Atticus Finch.¹³³ By the beginning of the 1960s in Birmingham, these two “types” of southern manhood carried political freight, although few in the city reflected the corruption of Bob Ewell’s character or the dignity of Finch’s. Still, when the film debuted in Birmingham on the first day of the spring demonstrations, the film portended the coming months in 1963 in Birmingham. While not as simple as Lee’s novel, class did appear as a mark of racial sentiment in the city by the close of 1963. However, the rhetoric pushed by society’s “better” distorts the

¹³⁰ Letter to Siebels regarding pornography, 18 June 1964, Siebel Papers, Collection 263, Box 2, File 1, BPLAD.

¹³¹ Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 8.

¹³² Graham, *Framing the South*, 8.

¹³³ Graham, *Framing the South*, 10.

experiences of Birmingham whites in this time of deep turmoil. Nurtured by the city's businessmen and the press, the image of the southern businessman emerged unscathed by Birmingham's violence and turbulence. As the city appeared on the front pages of newspapers across the country, local whites grew painfully aware that they were fast becoming the nation's black eye. Those in the middle- and upper-classes consciously distanced themselves from the blooming stigma of southern violence and, by so doing, dodged disgrace and left poorer whites to be judged and shamed for the guilt of a generation. Even after Connor's dogs and the Sixteen Street Baptist Church bombing, whites in Birmingham continued to fight integration. While the image of a chest thumping, violent racist could no longer command respect in the city, Birmingham's whites refused to abandon segregation. The newly empowered black community in the city pushed their white counterparts to shore up southern, white manhood through more palatable means. The white-collared businessman and his fight for Christianity and against Communism provided a path to keep the races separate while proclaiming adherence to a Christian, rather than a southern, agenda.

CHAPTER SIX “THE DIGNITY OF OUR PEOPLE”

In September 1958, Jefferson County state senator and lieutenant governor nominee Albert Boutwell, standing before a pro-segregation rally in Birmingham, called for a renewal of state's rights in Alabama. Sponsored by the wealthy congregation of Highlands Methodist Church, the center of Methodist resistance, the gathering brought together the well-to-do and well-connected in northern Alabama. Boutwell's popularity in Birmingham derived in large part from his authorship of the pupil placement plan, which sought to stave off Alabama's implementation of the *Brown* decision.¹ In 1963, Boutwell replaced Connor, Hanes, and Waggoner to preside over the new city council and Birmingham as mayor. His carefully pressed, long-sleeved shirts, wire-rimmed glasses, and reputation for careful consideration signaled a new era in the steel city. Possessed of both good business sense and an ear for the changing politics of white resistance, Mayor Boutwell promised to be a “spokesman for the better class of citizenry” in Birmingham. Once elected, Boutwell led and perpetuated the fight for segregation quietly. In a departure from his open posturing in 1958, Birmingham's new mayor took the struggle for segregation behind closed doors while espousing racial progress in public. In May 1963, he opposed the school board's decision to expel over one thousand black children who skipped school to participate in the spring protests. In August, however, he quietly sought a court order to postpone school integration. In September, when Robert Chambliss, Bobby Cherry, and Tim Blanton murdered the four young girls on September 15, the newly-elected mayor appeared on television with tears in his eyes to urge a moment of prayer for the victims and the city. But two weeks

¹ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 113.

later, when President John F. Kennedy sent West Point football coach Earl Blaik and former Secretary of the Army Kenneth Royall to “reconcile the Negro and white communities” in the aftermath of the bombing, Boutwell failed to invite any black leaders to the meeting. Instead, he whisked Blaik and Royall off to have lunch Mountain Brook Country Club, an exclusively-white “sanctuary.” There, Boutwell informed his visitors of their purely advisory role in his city, as racial peace in Birmingham was most often hampered rather than aided by “professional outside agitators.”² His purpose was not to dismantle white supremacy but, instead, to present “the illusion of dramatic racial progress.”³

This chapter examines the evolution of a new manifestation of southern racism, one which was practiced rather than preached and often concealed within a discourse of morality when publicly aired. Whereas segregationists in the 1940s and 1950s explicitly bound blackness with cultural and moral inferiority, the violence of the early 1960s compelled most whites to practice prudence when discussing racial differences. Still, the cultural supremacy of southern whites was accepted almost entirely in the white South into the 1960s.⁴ White southerner’s preference for segregation in an age of integration took a variety of forms in Birmingham and across the South. The chapter documents not only the emerging discourse of racial equality in the 1960s but also the processes concealed by the public rhetoric, most specifically the fight to maintain white suburbs and the campaign for morality that was most vehemently pushed by wealthier whites living within the city limits. Even as white moderates fought against annexation

² “Post Article Says Aloud what Birmingham Whispers” *Birmingham News*, 20 May 1963.

³ *Newsweek*, 11 December 1964.

⁴ “Civil Rights: The Pistol on the Steps,” *Time*, 4 October 1963.

and advocated the cultural supremacy of whites, they sought to maintain a public image of progressiveness. Through biracial committees, public relations work, and the constant employment of the specter of the lower-class racist, the middle-class men of the city preserved their moderate image, their political power, as well as, their white neighborhoods, school and churches.

Operation New Birmingham

In 1957, a group of white businessmen formed the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association (BDIA) to counter the growing popularity of suburban shopping and to prevent the disintegration of the downtown business district.⁵ That year, Eastwood Mall, the largest indoor mall in the country, opened its doors in East Birmingham, drawing shoppers away from the city core and into the suburbs. Between 1957 and 1963, the BDIA served to build and revitalize downtown Birmingham. In 1963, the group changed its name from the Downtown Improvement Association to Operation New Birmingham (ONB). While still focused on the business of keeping the city center appealing and productive, Mayor Albert Boutwell and the city council charged the President John C. Elvins and ONB with a second responsibility: “the promotion of racial and ethnic harmony and justice in our community.”⁶ The decision came in the wake of the turmoil of 1963 as city businessmen realized the financial repercussions of Birmingham’s reputation as “the most rotten city in America.”⁷ Recognizing that they needed a focused committee, a group of ONB members formed the Community Affairs Committee (CAC), a biracial group of white and black business and community leaders

⁵ “History of ONB” website, <http://www.yourcitycenter.com/HistoryofONB.aspx>, accessed 3 July 2010.

⁶ “History of ONB” website, <http://www.yourcitycenter.com/HistoryofONB.aspx>, accessed 3 July 2010.

⁷ “The Most Rotten City in America” 17 September 1963, *Chicago Daily Defender*.

organized, “to smooth integration of businesses and public facilities.”⁸ In a confidential meeting of the group relations committee just weeks after the church bombing, Birmingham’s civic leaders struggled to come up with a list of improvements to bring the city back from the brink.

The Community Affairs Committee prioritized plans that would present the appearance of a changing city. The biracial group voted to desegregate local churches, agreed to remain focused on improving Birmingham’s image, and planned to pressure their civic and professional associates to “elect Negroes to leadership” in local business associations.⁹ Comprised of black and white community leaders, the CAC began to meet every Tuesday morning for breakfast to “bluntly thrash out problems.”¹⁰ In December, the group created a plan for the coming year to address the problems of racial inequity; their priorities included open public facilities, employing blacks as policemen and firemen, sponsoring black artists, acknowledging publicly contributions of African-American citizens, and communicating authentic historical facts “of a positive nature concerning Negroes.”¹¹ The CAC’s agenda in the first few years remained superficial, however. The director of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, Norman Jimerson, chastised Boutwell in 1964 for failing to “demonstrate responsible

⁸ “History of ONB” website, <http://www.yourcitycenter.com/HistoryofONB.aspx>, accessed 3 July 2010.

⁹ “Minutes of 5th meeting of Group relations Committee,” 31 October 1963, Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box, 4, File 10, BPLAD

¹⁰ “Can Birmingham Break with its Past?” *Business Week*, 15 March 1969, 140-146.

¹¹ CAC on Group Relations, 30 December 1963, Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box 4, File 1, BPLAD.

action in reducing discrimination” through the CAC,” which was, according to Jimerson, “idle.”¹²

In the beginning of 1965, the committee invited William Bowen, the Vice President of the Urban Association in Little Rock, to the annual meeting of the group.¹³ Bowen came to Birmingham as a steward from another tarnished southern city to share how his city recovered from national disgrace. While acknowledging that “prospects of future projects, even when involving a drastic departure from the past, are nevertheless, influenced by that past,” Bowen provided a template for “revitalization” which involved the restoration of old buildings, the building of new ones, the founding of a beautification board and, most notably, the clearance of black slums.¹⁴ It was this last point that the *Birmingham News* quickly applauded. In an article published two days after Bowen’s visit, the *News* emphasized his suggestion to overcome “a poor image” by addressing “the problem of better use of properties which have multiple ownerships, absentee owners” which can become “a drag on any central city area.”¹⁵ A key plank in Operation New Birmingham to overcome its reputation as “Bombingham,” therefore, was the demolition of African-American neighborhoods.

Endorsing Bowen’s suggestions, the members of Operation New Birmingham launched a war for the city’s image. Employing the military metaphor on the official

¹² Norman Jimerson to Boutwell, 20 March 1964, Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box 4, File 13, BPLAD.

¹³ Address by William Bowen, Vice President from Urban Progress Association in Little Rock at Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association Meeting, 4 March 1965, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 4, File 41.

¹⁴ Address by William Bowen, Vice President from Urban Progress Association in Little Rock at Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association Meeting, 4 March 1965, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 4, File 41.

¹⁵ “Making Birmingham’s Plans Come True,” *Birmingham News*, 7 March 1965.

association stationary, they listed their address as ‘battle headquarters.’ On January 18, 1965, ONB, together with the Architecture League of Birmingham and Mayor Boutwell, unveiled the “Design for Progress,” a master plan for development in downtown Birmingham including the construction of new office and city buildings, an airport, and a program for slum clearance.¹⁶ The design became a reality. By 1969, Birmingham had a beautification board, construction was underway for twenty-six new buildings, the city had invested \$36-million on a new civic center, owners modernized hotels and expanded department stores across the downtown area and Mayor George Seibels pushed through a \$50 million bond issue for an airport, road, and public facilities expansion.¹⁷ The new developments came at a cost. While residents in downtown Birmingham received grants and low-interest loans to “spruce up” a 172 block area just north of the business district under the project name, “Operation Pride,” the landlords and homeowners in this area experienced strict code enforcements – if they could not afford to fix up their properties, they would have to sell. One resident wrote to Council member George Huddleston about the injustice of the inspections, “These inspectors” he complained, “are authorized to enter your home, inspect it for what they deem to be violations (retroactive, mind you) . . . and give you 60 days to make such corrections. The real intent,” the citizen wrote, was “to make it so costly for you to continue to live in your house . . . that you will sell at a loss.”¹⁸ In addition to Operation Pride, urban developers, “to help reverse the tide of urban decay and suburban exodus” cleared low-

¹⁶ Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association Meeting, January 1965, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 4, File 40.

¹⁷ “Can Birmingham Break with its Past?” *Business Week*, 15 March 1969.

¹⁸ “A Concerned Citizen” to George Huddleston, 6 August 1966, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 1, File 6, BPLAD.

income housing areas such as Avondale and Tuxedo Junction, a cost disproportionately carried by Birmingham's African-American community.¹⁹

Meanwhile, Operation New Birmingham adopted the somewhat defensive slogan, 'I am proud to live in Birmingham' and circulated the phrase on bumper stickers and on the association's letterhead. Most of the white members of the CAC did not live in Birmingham, however, and the suburban composition of a group responsible for directing city affairs frustrated city residents. In his weekly column in the *Eastern Sun*, Lou Harper calculated that "plush Mountain Brook" had greater representation on the CAC than whites within the city. Mountain Brook, which had a population of 17,000, sent sixty-seven whites to the CAC while the 250,000 white residents in West End, Woodlawn, and similar neighborhoods sent sixty-four representatives. Lower-class whites watched as suburban businessmen and black community leaders worked toward integrated facilities which would never house suburban women or children. "Mountain Brook," Harper noted, "will be able to have her cake and eat it, too."²⁰

Throughout the 1960s, the CAC continued to foster communication between the races. Over breakfast every Tuesday morning, white and black businessmen and leaders appointed by Mayor Boutwell discussed Birmingham's problems and plans.²¹ But while this meeting between the upper echelons of both races signaled progress, Charles Morgan and Dr. John Nixon, a leader in the African-American community, remained dubious. In 1966, Morgan admitted that the city, compared to the Birmingham

¹⁹ "Nails and Paint Stop the Bulldozers" announcement, 10 July 1966, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 7, File 49, BPLAD.

²⁰ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 121.

²¹ Executive Committee to Mayor and Council regarding a resolution of the group relations committee to open up public facilities in Birmingham, no date, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 25, folder 25. BPLAD.

of 1963 “had progressed but compared with the civilized world, it has not kept pace.”²²

Dr. Nixon was anxious to see real change by 1969 when he expressed “the prevailing view of Negroes” when he reported to *Business Week*. “We’ve finished the little niceties like sitting down at the same table for breakfast. Now, we’re getting down to the nitty-gritty,” Nixon declared. “The city is at the fork of its road.”²³ It was not until 1969, according to Alabama historian Glenn Eskew, that the Mayor invested the Community Affairs Committee with any meaningful input.²⁴ Morgan and Nixon’s suspicions were well founded.

Suburbia’s Fight to Stay White

In his comment on the South’s response to the black freedom struggle, Leslie Dunbar, a Southern Regional Council member wrote: “The Movement would forever dispel the lie of black inferiority upon which southern society was structured and maintained.”²⁵ Birmingham native Doug Carpenter Dunbar’s mused, “The fact that Blacks were as human as Whites was just beginning to soak into the consciousness of people,” in Alabama in the 1960s.²⁶ This difficult recognition, however, did not deter

²² “Can Birmingham Break with its Past?” *Business Week*, 15 March 1969. Campaigns against Communism, corruption, pornography, and prostitution characterized the city council’s agenda throughout the mid-1960s as well as their public willingness to comply with forced integration of the city’s schools and eventually, the city’s police force. However, the underlying assumptions of white power and dominance remained intact through the 1960s in Birmingham. This is evidenced not only by the lingering race wage across the city but also by the fighting between white and black leadership brought on by President Johnson’s War on Poverty and the Model Cities Program.

²³ “Can Birmingham Break with its Past?” *Business Week*, 15 March 1969, 140-146.

²⁴ Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 325.

²⁵ Leslie Dunbar, *The Shame of Southern Politicians: Essays and Speeches*, (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky): 29.

²⁶ Email correspondence between Doug Carpenter and Heather Bryson, 10 March 2010. Mr. Carpenter wrote about the process by which whites in Alabama came to grips with the civil rights movement. This comment came out of his discussion of white men refraining from sex with black women in the 1960s.

suburban men from their fight to remain apart from the integrated city. Following the violence of 1963, as Boutwell and Smyer touted racial reconciliation and progress, men collared in both white and blue clung to their dreams of racial separateness and white supremacy. In the suburban community, the struggle for racial exclusion between 1954 and 1970 became most apparent in Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood's fight against annexation.

With the court-ordered integration of parks and schools in 1963, the tension between city and suburban residents increased as white-collar suburbanites urged racial moderation in Birmingham while simultaneously resisting annexation to keep their parks and schools lily-white. Historians have recently examined trends of suburbanization to argue that white flight was an effect of racial integration and a source of an increasingly Republican South.²⁷ Moving one's family into new neighborhoods and schools was both a personal and political act. In the 1960s in Birmingham, blue-collar families increasingly left the city. However, most of the wealthier citizens of Jefferson County did not move; they already lived outside of the city limits. In 1958, 1964, and 1971, residents of Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood, temporarily departing from their public stance on racial progress, betrayed their animus toward integration in their campaign to preserve their schools, libraries, and parks for the fairly completed.

Economically, joining the city seemed promising. Most men who lived in the wealthier suburbs worked in the city and would profit from a larger city with an increased

Doug Carpenter is son of the Episcopal Bishop of Alabama who was first addressed in King's letter from jail.

²⁷ Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*; Crespino, *In Search of Another Country*.

tax base. Following the turbulence of 1963, men in both city and suburb regarded annexation as a way to stem Birmingham's sharp decline. YMBC member and future mayor of Birmingham, David Vann, urged suburbanites to join with the city; city residents agreed. "If Birmingham, strangled as it is by smaller municipalities on all sides, deteriorates into a second-class city every suburb will suffer with it."²⁸ If the past offered any guide, racial segregation would keep whites who lived "over-the-mountain" from ever becoming a part of the integrated city.

Six years earlier, the Birmingham Downtown Improvement Association formed the Citizens for Merger Committee (CMC) to manage a campaign to annex Birmingham's surrounding suburbs, including the richest municipalities of Mountain Brook and Homewood. Mayor Jimmie Morgan, the two daily newspapers, the local trade unions, and residents in both city and suburb supported the merger which appeared on the ballot in the fall of 1958. To advocate annexation to suburbanites, the CMC distributed pamphlets, "Birmingham Needs Us and We Need Birmingham," which highlighted the growing city-suburb disparities and circulated a letter from Atlanta Mayor William Hartsfield which centered on the positive effects of the 1952 annexation of Buckhead.²⁹ One local proponent estimated that seventy-five percent of the city's business leaders lived in Homewood or Mountain Brook, making double and even triple the income of city residents. Mayor Morgan believed that Mountain Brook's residents filled one-third of the positions on city boards. The "over-the-mountain, big shot"

²⁸ Vann Editorial, *Birmingham News*, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 6, File 2, BPLAD.

²⁹ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 101.

influence in city politics raised the ire of Birmingham's working people.³⁰ Conversely, the suburban proponents of annexation wanted to expand their control over city matters and financially buoy the downtown area. Attorney George "Peaches" Taylor argued that "the merger would add conservative votes on election day" and keep Birmingham's blacks and working-class whites from electoral control.³¹ The fate of both city and suburb were inextricably tied, argued the CMC.

Many white parents in Mountain Brook and Homewood, however, cared less about the financial health of the city than about the racial composition of their parks and schools. Even as suburban proponents of annexation attempted to skirt the issue of racial integration by proposing plans to keep the school districts separate, opponents reminded suburban residents that the fate of 2,000 "Mountain Brook Children" hung "in the balance."³² The Citizen's Information Committee (CIC), an anti-merger organization, used advertisements and mailings to argue that integration would certainly follow annexation. Chaired by Richard Stockham, president of the large industrial complex, Stockham Valves and Fittings, the CIC scared suburbanites away from annexation. In 1959, in both Homewood and Mountain Brook, voters turned out en masse and overwhelmingly blocked the merger. Over three-fourths of Mountain Brook's registered voters went to the polls, voting 2,350 to 1,492 to remain above and apart from Birmingham. City residents felt spurned.³³ The power of men in Mountain Brook and

³⁰ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 101; Lawrence McNeil to City Council member, 10 July 1964, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 1, File 6, BPLAD.

³¹ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham* 102.

³² Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 101.

³³ *Birmingham News*, 13 May 1959.

Homewood continued to be a source of resentment for many in Birmingham, resulting in opposition to city appointments for suburban men. Lawrence McNeil, a real estate agent and resident of Birmingham, wrote to the City Council to discourage any “over-the-mountain” nominations; to appoint men who lived over the mountain, McNeil wrote, seemed “monstrous and belittles the dignity of our city council by making its members look like errand boys for wealthy non-residents.”³⁴

In 1964, another campaign, “One Great City,” put the issue of annexation back on the ballot. Following the terrible violence of 1963 and the purported stance of the suburban, upper- and middle-class men concerning racial compromise, Mountain Brook and Homewood reconsidered annexation. The merger promised to secure political power for suburban moderates to steer the city away from its troubled past and revitalize the downtown upon which they were financially dependent. The national discourse regarding America’s cities underlined this point. Director of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Robert Weaver cautioned “almost every major US city must fight advancing physical decay and increasing squalor . . . the notion that the city can pull itself up by its bootstraps is a snare and a delusion.”³⁵ Birmingham needed Mountain Brook, Homewood, and Vestavia Hills to become a part of the city.

Increasingly, white-collar moderates who lived in city and suburbs advocated acceptance of federal legislation, both school desegregation and observance of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Frank Newton, Chair of Birmingham’s Chamber of Commerce, urged government and private businesses in the city to prepare a course of action “that

³⁴ Lawrence McNeil to City Council members, 10 July 1964, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 1, File 6.

³⁵ *Time Magazine*, 4 March 1966

fits your situation” to execute the requirements of the civil rights bill.³⁶ But while “over-the-mountain” men urged the city residents to desegregate peacefully, Homewood and Mountain Brook residents scrambled to keep separate school districts should the merger vote pass. The PTA at Mountain Brook’s Crestline Elementary School proposed a separate school system in the event of annexation. After two years of work, representatives of Birmingham and Mountain Brook had a plan to merge suburb with city with the understanding that the schools would remain separate, “to resolve the difficult problem of allowing Mountain Brook to operate its own school system.”³⁷ Although merger advocates simultaneously tried to negotiate separate school districts for the suburban municipalities, they also spoke frankly about the fact that integration was coming to the South, with or without annexation. One member declared, “Like it or not, the civil rights bill is the law and one would be like the proverbial ostrich with its head in the sand to dream and hope that there will be no more intrusions. No county school, whether in Homewood or elsewhere, is immune to the 1954 Supreme Court decision, distasteful as it is.”³⁸ Birmingham’s wealthy suburbanites did not believe in the inevitability of integration.

On August 16, 1964, the United Americans for Conservative Government sponsored a rally to challenge “the integrationist city government” and its “plan to

³⁶ Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, 125

³⁷ “City of Birmingham Meeting in Council Chamber of City Hall” Minutes, 6 July 1965, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 7, File 25, BPLAD.

³⁸ “Jefferson County Board of Education Addressing Questions of Annexation” 2 December 1966, Seibels’ Papers, Collection 273, Box 7, File 25, BPLAD.

merger our segregated neighbors into our integrated city.”³⁹ In 1964 and 1971, white suburbanites voted against annexation. The presumptuous power of the suburban “hand biting nest fowlers,” as one city resident called suburban businessmen, exacerbated the distrust between the poor and wealthy whites in Jefferson County.⁴⁰ Suburban men pushed for integration, refused to participate in it, and then blamed the poor for resisting progress, which provided middle- and upper-class whites with a reason to intervene in and direct city politics. Describing this phenomenon, southern historian Jason Sokol writes: “Crass working-class racial sentiment worked hand-in-hand with the machinations and justifications of the powerful.”⁴¹ Throughout the 1960s, the middle and upper-class suburbanites around Birmingham lauded racial progress, hired public-relations professionals make sure that everyone recognized that they were the South’s civilizing force, and left Dr. Nixon’s “nitty-gritty” to the poorer residents.

As black children integrated parks and schools in Birmingham, the division between city and suburb grew ever more racialized. After the wealthier suburbanites refused to cast their lot with the city, working-class whites began to move out of Birmingham, reversing the migration that took place just two decades before. Working-class and lower-class suburbs such as Fultondale, Gardendale, and Pleasant Groves became more populous over the course of the 1960s, while Birmingham’s population grew smaller and blacker.

³⁹ Pamphlet for Rally “White Citizens Wake Up” Sponsored by United Americans for Conservative Government, Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box 4, File 10, BPLAD.

⁴⁰ Lawrence McNeil to City Council members, 10 July 1964, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 1, File 6.

⁴¹ Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 308.

Between 1963 and 1973, Birmingham integrated the police force, the city council, the schools, the parks, and the neighborhoods. During this period, Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood suburbanites voted to remain separated from the city's racial imperatives while publicly and proudly encouraging peaceful integration for those so compelled. The easing of racial tensions and the lowest property taxes in the nation encouraged new investments to the city in the form of banking and insurance industries, as well as the growth of the University of Alabama in Birmingham and its medical center.⁴² But as new money poured into the city, old money washed out. Birmingham's coal and iron industry dwindled in the 1960s due to the growing preference for cheap Venezuelan, Japanese, and German iron ore. U.S. Pipe's Sloss-Sheffield Steel and Iron Company, one of the largest pig iron producers in the world, closed its doors in 1971. Woodward Iron Company, the district's most profitable iron producer, extinguished its furnaces in 1973.⁴³ The city had begun to rust.

Blue-Collar Exodus

By the early 1970s Birmingham was no longer a blue-collar town. Instead, the Magic City was in the middle of a transition from a steel economy to a service economy; a change which grew the number of white-collar jobs for men and new, supportive staff positions for women that included secretarial work in offices and banks and nursing positions at the medical center. Working-class blacks left the mines and mills to find employment in domestic and custodial labor essential to the new service economy.⁴⁴

⁴² Scribner, *Renewing Birmingham*, Chapter Five.

⁴³ Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy and the Decline of Liberalism*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998).

⁴⁴ US Census, Selected Characteristics of Persons and Families by Residence in Census Tracts with a Poverty Rate of 20 Percent or More: 1970. Table A-1, 3.

However, blue-collar white workers with little more than a high school diploma were left behind by the transition; their place in the city's work force gone with the closing of the mines and mills.

Whites who came to Birmingham from the hills of Appalachia in the 1940s and 1950s packed up their belongings in the 1960s and moved away from the city and into smaller towns nearby such as Midfield and Fultondale. Between 1960 and 1970, Birmingham lost 43,523 residents "to the bewilderment and disbelief" of city leaders.⁴⁵ A political transformation accompanied the residential change. Birmingham's laborers who voted for Adlai Stevenson in 1956 had, by 1964, forsaken the Democratic Party. An anti-statist sentiment took root among Birmingham's working whites who felt overpowered by the larger forces of a changing nation. Throughout the 1960s, employers forced them out of their jobs, federal officials forced them to integrate, and suburban businessmen forced them to comply; without jobs and waning political influence, working white men were left without a foothold to fight back. As a result, they left. Between 1960 and 1970, thousands of blue-collar workers moved out of Birmingham to find jobs as well as whiter neighborhoods. Many poorer whites abandoned the city just as wealthier whites fought to remain apart from it. Those white residents who remained within the city limits actively carved out white spaces even as they became the racial minority.

Birmingham's Moral Crusade: Securing Cultural Boundaries

James Baldwin commented on the function of black stereotypes in the twentieth century era when he asserted that whites constructed "the sociological myths and

⁴⁵ "Census Data on Lag in Growth Contested by Alabama Officials," *New York Times*, 5 July 1970, 30.

psychological legends” of blackness to “allow, at least for clarity.”⁴⁶ James McBride Dabbs argued similarly that the “main job of the white community, as white” was to “keep itself distinguished from the Negro community.”⁴⁷ In the age of integration, whites in Birmingham worked diligently to keep themselves “distinguished” from their black counterparts in the city. In the first half of the twentieth century, white southerners, such as the Durrs, understood racial difference in terms of both biology and morality. Physical and social distance perpetuated the lie. But with integration and a new era of racial politics, white southerners used issues of sexual morality as a wedge to keep white over black. The historiography of the civil rights movement demonstrates that the black freedom struggle pushed whites into suburbia and served as a catalyst for a new-fangled Republican Party, one which accommodated racist whites. Racial integration, however, also influenced sexual prescriptions for whites. In 1964, whites in Birmingham initiated a morality crusade to secure the boundaries of white supremacy through cultural prescriptions as the barriers of segregation fell away. Although the fusion of race and sexual morality is a well documented and explored southern tendency, its place in southern politics beyond the 1950s has not garnered much historical attention.

Moral panics, according to sociologists Howard Becker and Orrin Klapp, reflect a “societal moral struggle” which takes place during a “collective search for identity.”⁴⁸ The function of moral panics or crusades is Janus-faced: the first purpose is to establish clear rules for individuals within a society; the second is to “deviantize” others in order to

⁴⁶ James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1963), 11.

⁴⁷ Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 158.

⁴⁸ Howard Becker, *Outsiders* (New York: The Free Press, 1963); Orrin Klapp, *Collective Search for Identity* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969).

jettison them to the periphery of society.⁴⁹ The timing and the behavior of social anxiety reveal both the internal targets of the panic, as well as the people pinpointed as outsiders by the emergent moral order.⁵⁰ The moral crusade in Birmingham took place just as public facilities in the city desegregated. The fear of slackened sexual morality as evidenced by prostitution, pornography, and a loosening of sexual attitudes in films drove the campaign. I argue that the campaign against “the degradation of Alabama’s morality” took place as whites attempted to secure a moral order, with whites on top, as the legal order of segregation fell away.⁵¹

Although whites in Birmingham in the middle of the twentieth century leaned toward social conservatism, the liberalization of the race issue effected a hard right turn on all other issues deemed to be “moral” in nature. Prostitution, pornography, interracial sex, “sex perversion” and any movie or book which portrayed any of these “indeencies” provoked uproar from the public and concrete action on the part of local and state legislative bodies. The advent of conservative strictures on “indecent” images and subject material should be understood in the context of racial integration for two reasons. The first was purely political. Issues of morality provided Birmingham’s social and political leaders an entrée back onto a platform of public moral righteousness, a stage diminished by the 1961 Freedom Rides and virtually nonexistent in the wake of the violence of 1963, which included Bull Connor’s water cannons and the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. Men, who just months earlier had been roundly

⁴⁹ Edwin Schur, *The Politics of Deviance* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1980).

⁵⁰ Nachman Ben-Yehuda, “The Sociology of Moral Panics: Toward a New Synthesis” *The Sociological Quarterly* 27, No. 4 (Winter, 1986): 495-513.

⁵¹ WRBC Editorial, Voice of the People editorial in *Birmingham News*, 10 November 1965; Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 31.

condemned for the atrocities in their city, used issues of morality and decency as a path home to southern indignation.

Arguably, however, there was more to the battle against indecency than just political opportunity and the second reason points to a fundamental quality of southern white culture in the middle of the twentieth century – the belief in the superiority of white cultural norms. With the dismantling of overt white supremacy, white men and women searched for means of social control over their own. The campaigns in Birmingham against moral turpitude were led by whites; whites spied on and reported indecent activity and the sale of indecent movies, literature, and magazines, white men talked on the radio about issues of morality and it was white men in city hall and in the state congress who eventually passed laws to restrict pornography in books and on the big screen.⁵² Most importantly, however, all of the targets of the campaign to purify the city were white. This campaign against “moral decay” flowered between 1963 and 1967, the same years in Birmingham in which white schools, restaurants, theaters, parks, and playground were forced to admit blacks. The simultaneity of racial integration and the crusade to safeguard the city from “moral degradation” was not coincidental; it was a campaign to secure a racial hierarchy through moral prescriptions, what one white Methodist minister called, “the dignity of our people.”⁵³

The most prominent link between white supremacists and moral crusaders can be found in the Methodists Laymen’s Union which was largely based out of the wealthy

⁵² Although moral reform in the nineteenth century and twentieth century was most often the purview of women, in Birmingham, white men conceived of the crisis, organized the clubs and boards to address it, and passed it along to the state legislators – man to man. Few accounts of women doing much more than writing letters of support are undocumented.

⁵³ “A Pronouncement” Methodist Laymen’s Union, 12 February 1959, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 8, File 1, BPLAD.

congregation of Highland Methodist Church. Using the members of the Methodist Laymen's Union (MLU) in Birmingham as an example, this section demonstrates how the same group of men advocated white supremacy in 1959 and, again, in 1964. The comparison suggests how white leaders in Birmingham, by 1964, couched racial superiority in terms of morality. Southern attitudes justifying the racial order evolved across the twentieth century, from inferior biology to inferior culture; whites ascribed loose sexual mores and violence to southern, African Americans. The men of the MLU who warned against the "deterioration of their children's morals on the average" should integration come, were, by 1964, on a morality crusade that pinpointed only whites.⁵⁴

Powerful industrialists such as Richard Stockham and Perry Tarrant, state legislator Lawrence Dumas, and city councilman M.E. Wiggins led the MLU. As discussed in Chapter Two, these men took part in and authored the 1959 "Pronouncement," a tract that outlined the tenuous nature of white moral supremacy. In 1959, President of the Methodist Laymen's Union, Birmingham Circuit Judge Whit Windham, argued that while the "negro is a fellow human being," he is "substantially more given to . . . crimes of violence, sex, larceny, and theft."⁵⁵ In front of the wealthy members of Highlands Methodist, MLU leaders insisted that segregation was the only

⁵⁴ In recent years, southern historians have begun to explore the ways in which the civil rights movement transformed the white community. For the most part, these works have dealt with the growth of suburbia and the Republican Party. The works listed are just some of the important books and articles that deal with this transformation. Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932 – 1968*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Jane Dailey, "Sex, Segregation, and the Sacred after Brown"; Glenn Feldman and Patricia Sullivan, *Before Brown: Civil Rights and White Backlash in the Modern South*, (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2004); Kruse, *White Flight*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; Crespino *In Search of Another Country*. The model that I use in this project has been used to explore how sex structures race and class relations comes from the colonial studies of Ann Stoler, "Making Empire Respectable: The Politics of Race and Sexual Morality in Twentieth-Century Colonial Cultures," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 16, Issue 4 (1989): 634-660.

⁵⁵ "A Pronouncement" Methodist Laymen's Union, 12 February 1959, Vann Papers, Collection 113, Box 8, File 1, BPLAD.

way to keep their children safe and “clean.” In 1959, the MLU warned that integration would result in the “transfusion of racial and social morals,” specifically, racial mixing promised to “dilute the pure strain” of whiteness and “conceal and bury the malignancy” of blackness.

In 1959, MLU members Dumas, Wiggins, Stockham, and Tarrant publicly and explicitly argued for the moral supremacy of whites. Days after the church bombing in 1963, the Official Board of the First Pentecostal Holiness Church in Birmingham released a statement that echoed the Methodist Pronouncement: “The high number of common-law marriages, illegitimacy, venereal diseases; the low moral standards – as compared to those of the white race – makes mixing not only distasteful but dangerous.”⁵⁶ Intermarriage, according to the statement will be the natural result of integration, as evidenced by the “alarming” marriage between the first black female at the University of Georgia and a white student. Racial fears continued to be expressed through the discourse of sex and moral purity.⁵⁷

By 1964, Birmingham’s political leaders could no longer stand in front of gathered crowds and peddle the malignancy of blackness. With a new mayor and city council in office, Birmingham’s whites seemed anxious to leave their virulent racist image in the past and move into a new era of interracial cooperation. But while public displays of biracialism increased throughout the 1960s in Birmingham, the underlying assumptions of white supremacy remained. Throughout the decade, as desegregation occurred across Birmingham, the city’s whites fortified alternate means of hierarchy. When the

⁵⁶ Statement of the First Pentecostal Holiness Church, Birmingham, Alabama, 29 September 1963. Hamilton Papers, Collection 265, Box 4, File 10, BPLAD.

⁵⁷ Statement of the First Pentecostal Holiness Church, Birmingham, Alabama, 29 September 1963.

federal government compelled Birmingham to integrate parks and schools, former members of the MLU initiated a crusade “to create a better moral climate” across the city. White supremacy was at the root of this campaign.⁵⁸

In a study on the “Conditions of Commercialized Prostitution” in the Birmingham area in 1964, surveyors found that while there were very few brothels in the city except for those in the black sections of town (which were henceforth dropped in the municipal investigation), bellboys at nice, local hotels could provide you with names, numbers, and prices for a variety of white prostitutes based on physical descriptions and available services. One historic hotel, the Redmont, according to the survey, had two rooms for rent which came with a blond or brunette prostitute waiting inside rooms on the third floor, according to the survey.⁵⁹ With the unsettling findings of the study, Birmingham’s city council placed the tightening of the “seemingly lax” laws on prostitution on the 1964 agenda and the local police promised to keep an eye on the sites where white prostitutes worked. City council and the all-white police force addressed only the sex trade which took place in the white corners of Birmingham and left the brothels in the black community alone.⁶⁰ The crusade to improve the moral climate of Birmingham followed the pattern laid out by the campaign to address prostitution in the city - an overarching concern with exposure to indecencies in the white areas of the city and suburb coupled with neglect of exposure in the black community.

⁵⁸ C.E. Overton, Letter to the Editor of the *Birmingham News*, 4 January 1967, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 7, File 49, BPLAD.

⁵⁹ “Conditions of Prostitution in Birmingham and its Environs” January 1964, George Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 1, Folder 2. BPLAD

⁶⁰ This is consistent with the Birmingham Police Department’s treatment of houses of prostitution in the African-American sections of town – a regular complaint from black citizens in Birmingham is that the police received kick-backs from these establishments, Connor Papers, Collection 268, BPLAD.

The fear of slackened sexual standards among whites in Birmingham propelled the campaign for Christian “morality of thought.”⁶¹ Prostitution, pornography, or any magazine, book, or film that depicted or condoned sex outside of marriage fell under attack between 1965 and 1966. Councilmember George Siebels, who would later become Birmingham’s first Republican Mayor in 1967, endorsed the watchdog group “Citizens for Decent Literature.” Chaired by businessman Crawford George, Citizens for Decent Literature (CDL) fanned out across the city and suburbs, buying up “obscene” books and magazines while threatening to prosecute vendors for buying pornography carried across state lines, a federal offense according to George. Prostitution and pornography were not the only taboos in Birmingham. Race also played an role in the new push for “decency.” The *Alabama Baptist* labeled James Baldwin’s *Another Country* “unfit for Christians to read” and the CDL seconded this opinion by calling Baldwin’s book “pure filth.”⁶² The American States’ Rights Party kept the movie “Free, White, and 21” out of the city’s theaters under threat of boycott because of it featured an affair between an African-American prostitute and a white man.⁶³ By 1966, threats and boycotts to secure sexual control over the city’s whites moved from popular discourse to actual policy.

Concern over “obscene” content reached beyond the American States’ Rights Party and Citizens for Decent Literature. In the spring of 1965, Police Chief Jamie Moore and City Council members George Siebels and Eleazer C. Overton inquired into

⁶¹ Mrs. James Sizemore to Seibels expressing support for the Citizens for Decent Literature, 29 March 1965, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 5, File 9; 10 May 1964, ASRA Papers, BPLAD

⁶² Obscene Literature clippings and notes, Overton Papers, Collection 267, Folder 4, File 20, BPLAD.

⁶³ “Citizens for Decent Literature” letter, 29 March 1965, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 5, File 9.

the possibility of prosecuting certain downtown book stores and magazine stands which were reportedly selling pornographic literature and magazines. Overton warned that the “heinous monster” of pornography had moved beyond the city and “spread to the suburbs.”⁶⁴ Letters poured in from Birmingham’s citizens to inform the city council members and the police of different locations in which pornography could be purchased. Mayor Boutwell, Chief Moore, and city council members received piles of obscene cards, books, and magazines with the listed location of the stand or store from where it came. One magazine in particular, “Wife Traders,” came into the Mayor’s office from two different sources as proof that the downtown newsstands “and their sidewalk burlesque shows” had to be stopped. City Councilmen M. Edwin Wiggins and Eleazer Overton conferred about the September 1964 issue of *Playboy* and came to the joint conclusion that it was decidedly obscene. Councilman Siebel’s wife, reportedly unbeknownst to him, traveled downtown and purchased twelve “really obscene” magazines and brought them home to show her husband “just to confirm what she had heard from other people.” The stands and stores under suspicion fell within a small radius in the downtown and entirely white business district.⁶⁵ While Birmingham’s white population and municipal government took issue with the “morally depraving” literature on the street, council members were frustrated because Birmingham did not have any decency laws “with teeth in them.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ “Statement on Obscene Literature” E.C. Overton, 18 February 1965, Overton Papers, Collection 267, Folder 4, File 20, BPLAD.

⁶⁵ C.E. George to Mayor Boutwell, Chairman of Citizens for Decent Literature, 23 April 1965, Seibels Papers, , Collection 273, Box 2, File 30; M.E. Wiggins to Seibels, undated ,Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 30; Seibels to Mayor Boutwell, 21 September 1965, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 30, BPLAD

⁶⁶ M.E. Wiggins to Seibels, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 8, File 29, BPLAD.

Councilmember Overton resolved to fix this and in the fall of 1965, he introduced two pieces of legislation to stem the moral decay of the youth “as contributed to by obscene publications and movies.” In addition to the monitoring of magazines coming into the city, Overton proposed a review board for films to protect Birmingham’s youth against “coarse” subject matter in films. Following Overton’s proposals, House Representative Foster Etheridge commended the councilman’s efforts and pledged to push the proposed bills to “rid the newsstands and movie houses of obscenity” out of the legislative committee and get them passed. Another Alabama congressman from Birmingham, Representative Don Collins, introduced two bills to the state legislature with the intention to “rid our newsstands of filth.”⁶⁷ *The Catholic Weekly* urged Catholics, who had heretofore not been identified as a group in favor of the anti-obscenity laws, to be “one with the other religious groups who stand in favor of the review board.”⁶⁸ Birmingham’s Knights of Columbus raised and donated 15,000 dollars to give to the Citizens for Decent Literature. The Supreme Knight, John W. McDevitt, defended his decision to pour thousands into the group because he believed that “the problem of obscenity” was “almost diabolical in origin because of the utter depravity with which it” threatened the “minds and souls” of the young.⁶⁹ In May of 1965, Mayor Boutwell wrote

⁶⁷ Buck Etheridge to Davenport Smith, 4 June 1965, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 30, BPLAD.

⁶⁸ “WRBC Editorial, “Drive Against Pornography,” 3 February 1966, Siebels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 28.

⁶⁹ “WRBC Editorial, “Drive Against Pornography,” 3 February 1966.

to the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency to request federal aid to establish a program to help Birmingham's youth.⁷⁰

Radio stations, television broadcasters, and Birmingham's bookshops fell under the watchful eye of both the citizenry and the law. In a WRBC editorial, radioman Smith professed support of Overton's censorship board and implored his viewers to keep watch over the destructive forces in movie houses and in book stores, "We are greatly heartened by the new push against the sale of pornographic material in our area in which the police agencies are joined by John Q, Citizen."⁷¹ By 1967, Birmingham's leaders claimed to do all in their power to fight the "wild oats of liberalized public behavior" and standards.⁷² The Jefferson County's District Attorney's office, Sheriff's Department, and the Birmingham City Council pushed for the Jefferson County Movie Review Law but the law was held up in the Alabama Supreme Court. While the city leaders waited for the court, Birmingham's city council passed city ordinance 67-2, which made the sale of "obscene matter" in Birmingham a punishable offense. Within days, the Jefferson County News Company sent a letter to all of its vendors to let them know that the company would not make a distribution "that will violate this ordinance."⁷³

⁷⁰ Mrs. Lynn Kirk to William Hamilton, assistant to Mayor Boutwell, 5 May 1965, Hamilton Papers, Collection 269, Box 3, File 19.

⁷¹ WRBC Editorial, Davenport Smith, "Local Push against Pornography," 25 May 1965. Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 30.

⁷² Jefferson News Corporation to "All Vendors," 7 February 1967, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 29.

⁷³ WRBC Editorial, Voice of the People editorial in *Birmingham News*, 16 August 1965; Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 30; Buck Etheridge to Davenport Smith, 4 June 1965, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 30; *The Catholic Weekly*, 24 April 1966; Jefferson News Corporation to "All Vendors" 7 February 1967, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 29.

By 1965, members of Birmingham's city council partnered with white businessmen to create a movie review board. Hugh Locke, Jr., the son of the American States' Rights founder, and former Methodist Laymen's Unions members M.E. Wiggins and Lawrence Dumas sat on the board under the leadership of Councilman Overton. Mayor Boutwell attended the first meeting to encourage the board to protect Birmingham's children.⁷⁴ Rather than accepting movie ratings from the *Catholic Weekly* or the *PTA Magazine*, the members of Birmingham's movie review board met every other week from 1965 to 1966 to screen films before they opened in local theaters. Overton and his men were the first in the city to watch *Sex and the Single Girl*, *Sex Kitten Goes to College*, *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*, *Satan in High Heels*, *Return from the Ashes*, *Some Like it Hot*, *The Sandpiper* and many other films which they rated "A" for adult.⁷⁵

This campaign was not just about sex: it was also about white supremacy. While Birmingham's wealthy whites knew not to publicly discuss their ideas pertaining to black immorality as they had in 1959 at Highlands Methodist, the fears regarding racial "contamination" had not subsided. After 1963, public anxieties about morality became rooted in private fears about integration. Medical doctors and psychologists buoyed the urgency to address issues of morality explicitly and the dangers of integration, implicitly. Birmingham's WRBC radio and television programming publicized a 1965 tract from the American Medical Association which discussed the almost 800 percent increase in venereal diseases in urban areas which sprung from the "free and easy attitude toward moral standards" in America's cities. WRBC followed this story with findings from an

⁷⁴ Minutes of Movie Review Board Meetings, 1965-1966, Movie Review Board Papers, Collection 38, Folders 1, File 1.

⁷⁵ Minutes of Movie Review Board Meetings, 1965-1966, Movie Review Board Papers, Collection 38, Folders 1-2, all files.

Alabama psychologist, Dr. Thomas Stanton, who rooted “moral decay” in popular misconceptions held by people in the state who clung to the belief that everyone is equal and should therefore have equal rights – this, according to Stanton, was “simply not true,” Stanton told his radio listeners. “People are not equal in health, strength, or intelligence.” Furthermore, “the degradation of Alabama’s morality,” according to the psychologist’s conclusions, was evident “in the pickets and mass demonstrations.” Without ever mentioning race, Birmingham’s media employed medical doctors and a local psychologist to pin moral decay on southern blacks.⁷⁶

The fight against indecency became a deliberately public fight. Council members wrote letters to the editor of the *Birmingham News* and appeared on the radio and TV to make known their moral-cleansing campaigns. In a long letter to the *News*, councilman Overton proclaimed that those in civic responsibility “have been laboring over the last two years to create a better moral climate within our community for our children.”⁷⁷ By 1965, city officials had dropped the push to bind blackness with sexual immorality, as the Methodist Laymen’s Union had attempted in 1959. Instead, the campaign for decency in the city employed a southern rhetoric of morality which had always been used to delineate race. “Our convictions command us to remain as pure and clean as possible,” one man wrote to the *News*.⁷⁸ In the wake of desegregation of schools, parks, and playgrounds, constructions of white and black could no longer be marked by space.

⁷⁶ WRBC Editorial, Voice of the People editorial in *Birmingham News*, 10 November 1965; Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box 2, File 31.

⁷⁷ C.E. Overton, Letter to the Editor of the *Birmingham News*, 4 January 1967, Seibels Papers, Collection 273, Box, File 49.

⁷⁸ James Hublen, Letter to the Editor of the *Birmingham News*, 2 April 1965.

White men in Birmingham drew upon notions of racialized sexual morality in the 1940s to justify the racial order and in the 1950s as a means to combat integration. By the 1960s, the same white men sought to secure racial boundaries through the campaign for public morality. In fact, it was the exact same group of men including Lawrence Dumas, Perry Tarrant, Richard Stockham, and M. Edwin Wiggins. Wiggins, a board member of the Methodist Laymen's Unions whose name appeared on the 1959 Pronouncement which declared the moral purity of whiteness, served as a city council member in 1965 and helped lead the charge against the declining morality of Birmingham – he was one of the council members distressed by the September 1964 issue of *Playboy*. That the same handful of men who pushed for segregation based on ideas of the cultural inferiority of blacks in the 1950s took up the fight for decency in the 1960s underlines the broader phenomenon of securing racial boundaries through a crusade for collective behavior.

The campaign to establish clear moral codes for Birmingham's whites, as previously mentioned, had two causes: a need for a new political platform for men shamed by their city's violence and it was rooted in white fears that integration could lead to the moral degradation of their community. More notably, however, the campaign for public morality had two important effects. The first was one of discourse. Men on the radio and TV, newspapermen, and white politicians, through cries for decency, created a new way to couch ideas of racial superiority into a racially neutral language of sexual morality. But there was another, more concrete, effect which had little to do with how whites thought about or wanted to think about the black community. Instead, the campaign actually had less to do with how whites thought about blacks and more to do

with how whites in Birmingham thought about themselves. Between 1963 and 1967, Birmingham's politicians put white prostitutes out of business, reduced the incidence of sex scenes from the city's theaters and television programming, and banned sexually explicit literature and magazines in the businesses and homes of the city's whites. Biology, then, was no longer enough to keep white over black. By the 1960s, whites attempted to hem in the purported supremacy of their race through a public campaign for stringent sexual standards among their own.⁷⁹ With the morality campaigns, Protestant probity would stand in to keep white over black. Under the mantle of decency and civility, Birmingham's whites regained their voice in public matters and a renewed sense of Christian uprightness in private matters.

“And Then There is Birmingham . . . a Region of the Mind”

The bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church demanded explanation in ways that most racial crimes in the South had not. It was, according to men such as Charles Morgan, not just another injustice but rather the culmination of all other inequities, both the quiet degradations of Jim Crow as well as the shrill and violent expressions of fear and hatreds which characterized and directed life in the city.⁸⁰ Americans living outside of Jones Valley grappled with the crime and the dark character of Birmingham, “And then there is Birmingham – an entity of its own, a region of the mind,” wrote a *Time Magazine* reporter.⁸¹ In response to the murders, Alabamians and reporters attempted to explain how such a crime could take place. University of

⁷⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, “Tense and Tender Ties : The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies,” *The Journal of American History* (2001): 829-865.

⁸⁰ Charles Morgan, *A Time to Speak*, 16.

⁸¹ “Where the Stars Fall,” *Time Magazine*, 27 September 1963, 27-29.

Alabama philosophy professor Iredell Jenkins blamed Birmingham's problems on the city's demography. "The obvious thing about Birmingham," Jenkins opined, was "that there's just a lot of goddamn white trash that's conglomerated there."⁸² Jenkins' explanation in September 1963 was a minority view, however. From the White House to the halls of Congress, from the *Chicago Daily Defender* to the *New York Times*, not one politician or reporter reiterated this opinion. By the close of the 1960s, however, Jenkins' explanation had become the standard narrative for how the city would come to understand the crimes of 1963 and how Birmingham would project its past to the rest of the nation.

In the following years, white-collared men worked overtime to "protect" their children from integration while simultaneously creating an image of racial progress. To maintain segregation in their neighborhood and churches, they argued for the moral superiority of whites. To substantiate their claim to moderation, they distanced themselves from overt expressions of racism which could still be found in Birmingham. In 1958, the Methodists Laymen's Union announced their mission to safeguard the purity of white youth from the "hazardous, immoral" temptations of black culture. By 1967, the exact same men fought a crusade to protect their children from moral degradation, a historically racialized discourse but by the later 1960s, the historical context was implied. In 1958, white men and women in suburbia voted against annexation to avoid racial integration. In 1964, whites in Mountain Brook, Vestavia Hills, and Homewood made the same choice for the same reason. The underlying assumptions of white supremacy proved stubborn. Birmingham's whites continued to

⁸² "Where the Stars Fall," *Time Magazine*, 27 September 1963, 27-29.

express racial anxieties through matters of sexual control and morality. The gendered impulses of southern racism persisted. Although white leaders in Birmingham urged compliance with court-ordered integration, better white manhood, as symbolized by Boutwell, Stockham, Overton, and many of Birmingham's leaders, proved to be a myth.

Conclusion

The resolve of southern blacks and federal legislation made it impossible for whites to halt the movement for civil rights. Restaurants, parks, busses, municipal employment, and schools across the South opened their doors to people of both races. Southern whites surrendered Jim Crow piecemeal, however, and only certain aspects of white supremacy disappeared over the course of the 1960s. Instead, wealthy, white male control over the most private aspects of southern life continued, quietly and completely.

Throughout the 1960s, white men of means in Birmingham kept their churches, their neighborhoods, and their children's schools white. Most importantly, white men who lived in the suburbs and the affluent Southside of Birmingham perpetuated a discourse that fused slackened sexual morality and poor hygiene with black southerners to justify continued residential and social apartheid. Public discussions of venereal diseases, loosened sexual mores, and out-of-wedlock births among Birmingham's African Americans afforded white men the right to regulate the racial customs of their wives and children.⁸³ By impressing the vulgar on racialized bodies, white men attempted to discipline desire in the age of integration.⁸⁴

⁸³ Dabbs, *Southern Heritage*, 158.

⁸⁴ This concept, termed bio-politics by Michele Foucault, is discussed in Stoler, "Tense and Tender Ties," 829-865, in which she argues that a hierarchy of gender prescriptions helped the colonizer to order colonial relationships.

After 1963, Birmingham's leaders made public their desire to work with blacks and desegregate public facilities, as necessary. Behind closed doors, however, Mayor Boutwell, City Council members, and well-to-do citizens tried to preserve segregation in the lives of their wives and their children.⁸⁵ Whereas integrated boardrooms, golf courses, and business lunches passed without comment in the 1960s, spaces for women and children: church socials, schools, and neighborhoods remained spaces of contest. White men fought to preserve their roles as the arbiters of social customs; taking upon themselves the burden of self-regulation while regulating interracial contact for their wives and children. The male chauvinism manifest in southern, white supremacy could not be dismantled by the civil rights movement alone.

This hypocrisy affected the lives of southerners both politically and personally. Two years after the church bombing, Paul Good visited Birmingham and found some "disquieting truths about the effects" of the Movement in the city. Integration of public facilities contrasted sharply with the "abundant and grinding poverty" among inner-city residents that robbed African Americans of the "chance for progress."⁸⁶ "On the surface," another reporter noted, Birmingham "presents the illusion" of progress but the rationale of superiority which had always supported Jim Crow remained largely intact.⁸⁷ In addition to white flight and the expansion of the black ghetto in the 1960s, the disjuncture between the words and deeds of Birmingham's political leaders in this era profoundly affects how we understand the end of the Movement. Moderate

⁸⁵ Male spaces: boardrooms, golf courses, political meeting rooms integrated without comment, but neighborhoods, schools, churches, spaces for both women and children, remained places of contest. Racial segregation was imposed upon white women and children but not white men.

⁸⁶ Paul Good, "Birmingham: Two Years Later," *Reporter* 2 December 1965, 21-27.

⁸⁷ *Newsweek*, 11 December 1964, 124.

businessmen did not help bring about a peaceful end to white supremacy. Instead, men like Albert Boutwell and Richard Stockham muted southern racism, recognizing what a visiting reporter referred to as, “The national tendency – perhaps even a need – to equate quiet with racial progress.”⁸⁸

In practice, Birmingham’s leaders strived to preserve white supremacy through church and neighborhood campaigns for “decency.” The tendrils of racism rooted in the body were not so easily relinquished and the ongoing fight against miscegenation, the southern *bête noir*, survived the Movement. Whites in Birmingham, much like their mayor, abandoned the public campaign for segregation and began to work on a local, more personal level. Integration was inevitable; all Alabamians knew this by 1964. But it was not inevitable everywhere – wealthier whites in Birmingham set about making sure that their specific neighborhoods and their children would not be “contaminated” by black children and black culture. In the suburbs, the well-to-do fought annexation to avoid school desegregation while whites within the city worked to secure racial boundaries in the social lives of their young; anxieties of racial purity continued to be played out white women and girls, and young white men. Southern, white manhood had not shed its racist constructions.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Newsweek*, 11 December 1964, 124.

⁸⁹ Sitton, “Boutwell Seated in Birmingham: Peace Hopes Rise,” 1.

CONCLUSION

“There is something about the history of this place,” wrote *New York Times* reporter James Reston of Birmingham in 1963, “some relationship between the idea of the supremacy of the dollar and the supremacy of the white man” that has allowed whites in the city to feel immune to social changes in the rest of the nation. The southern steel town “is not like any other city in the country,” Reston continued, “no generalization about Birmingham is safe.”⁹⁰ In many ways, Reston was right. Birmingham was not a typical southern city. Moneyed men founded the city after the Civil War and more European immigrants and northerners lived in Birmingham than in any other town or city in the Deep South. In the first half of the twentieth century, working men in Birmingham possessed a working-class consciousness unparalleled in the region which was nurtured by the absolute exploitation by their northern investors and wealthy overseers, as well as by the intimate organization of the company neighborhoods. It was not, however, a satellite city from the North. Extreme poverty, the large percentage of blacks, Jim Crow, and the evangelical culture of Birmingham tightly bound the city to its region.

The easiest generalization about Birmingham in the twentieth century could be that it was a city of extremes. Until the rise of the University of Alabama in Birmingham and the adjoining medical center in the 1970s, Birmingham’s steel economy kept the city on an economic brink. Insecurity, powerlessness, poverty, and resentment characterized the lives of many residents whose livelihoods were at the whim of the colonial economy. “Hard times come here first and stay the longest,” became a local

⁹⁰ James Reston, “Birmingham: Look Away . . . Look Away, Look Away Dixieland,” *New York Times*, 20 September 1963.

saying, an accurate depiction of life in Birmingham during both the Great Depression and the jagged transformation from an industrial economy to a service economy in the city.⁹¹ Not everyone in Jefferson County struggled, however. Mountain Brook, one of the wealthiest cities in America, stood in sharp contrast to the city below. Tudor-style mansions, quaint village centers, rolling lawns, and Mountain Brook's palatial country club hid mockingly behind a dense forest on the rise of Red Mountain as men and women in Jones Valley lived, work, and died under the industrial haze.

For most of the twentieth century, however, the chasm between the between the working-class in the city and the middle- and upper-classes on Birmingham's eastern rise and in the suburbs was not enough to keep whites from working collectively for segregation. In recent years, southern historians have turned a keen eye toward the underlying principles of devout white resistance. The psychological, political, and pecuniary wages of white supremacy undergird both working whites' fealty to segregation as well as elites' attachment to the southern caste system. Glenn Feldman, Robert Norrell, and Robert Ingalls have each argued that the abstract allure of racial privilege supplanted the concrete advantages of class solidarity in Alabama from the Great Depression to Massive Resistance.⁹² Alabama communists, the UMWA, and the SWOC each gained a powerful foothold in the Deep South state, only to lose it in the aftermath of WWII in a flurry of Cold War and white supremacist rhetoric. In the 1940s and 1950s, southern white workers turned away from interracial cooperation to protect

⁹¹ Robert Corley, interview with Heather Bryson, 12 March 2010.

⁹² Feldman, Glenn. *From Demagogue to Dixiecrat: Horace Wilkinson and the Politics of Race and The Disfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama*; Robert J. Norrell, "Caste in Steel: Jim Crow Careers in Birmingham, Alabama" and "Labor at the Ballot Box: Unions in Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrats"; Robert P. Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham during the 1930s."

the social and economic privileges of whiteness in the twentieth-century. Racial supremacy kept white men above black men, both in the workplace and southern society.⁹³

Wealthy whites benefitted from a divided working class, as well, although the benefits were more substantive.⁹⁴ Southern elites used the dilemma of race to exploit the laboring class and garner votes on Election Day. But while the myth of the South is a society of haves and have-nots, by the 1950s, middle-class whites increasingly peopled the urban South. In Birmingham, businessmen, lawyers, and those that occupied the higher ranks in the industrial order fell into line with the Big Mules. Massive resistance ameliorated, rather than exacerbated, class divisions in Birmingham. By situating white backlash into the gendered context of the twentieth century, we can begin to understand why the appeal of resistance, a movement bent on white, male supremacy, crossed class lines.⁹⁵

In Birmingham, the inferior place of African Americans, the submission of white youth, and the subservient role of women were each implicated in the status of white men in the middle of the twentieth century, regardless of social standing. The breakdown of traditional hierarchies and the loss of autonomy caused by the field – to – factory transition compounded the need among Birmingham’s men to secure their

⁹³ Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹⁴ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1997), Carl Grafton and Anne Permaloff, *Big Mules and Branchheads: James E. Folsom and Political Power in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985).

⁹⁵ Philip Wylie, "The Abdicating Male and How the Gray Flannel Mind Exploits Him through His Women," *Playboy*, 3 November 1956, 23–24, 50, 79, in K.A. Courdileone, "Politics in an Age of Anxiety: Cold War Political Culture and the Crisis in American Masculinity, 1949-1960" *Journal of American History* 87, Vol 2 (September 200) 515-545, p. 515.

gender identities in society and at home. White supremacy and Christianity became overlapping social systems in the South and stood as stalwart defenders of traditional gender and race relations among whites. Throughout the tumult of the civil rights era, white men performed white, male supremacy by castrating black men, turning fire hoses on demonstrators, and rallying for segregated schools in the name of women and the young. Enacting the Boswell Amendment, creating and campaigning for the Pupil Placement Act, fighting annexation, and lecturing on the cultural cleanliness of white southerners were also performances of white, male supremacy. The social positioning of men has always been associated with sexual and political (or racial) power. In the middle of the twentieth century, white southern men fought against the dislocation of each.

Although blue-collar whites used ideas of racial supremacy to safeguard privilege and status on the shop floor and the larger society while their white-collar counterparts used racial divisions to increase their political power and decrease workers' wages, it behooves us to understand the shared ways in which *all* white men benefited from the societal control implicit within the southern caste system. Only when we clearly understand how southern white supremacy augmented men's power over women and children, as well as African Americans, will we be able to finally move beyond the dangerous notion that southern racism in the twentieth century was the provenance of poor whites.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Heather Bryson was born in 1977 in Winter Park, Florida to Kim and Dennis Bryson. She grew up in Winter Park with her parents, her older sister, Bridget, and her younger brother, Henry. She earned her bachelor's degree in history from Loyola University in New Orleans in 2000. Returning home to Winter Park, Heather taught history at a local middle school for four years.

In 2005, she moved to Gainesville, Florida to begin graduate school at the University of Florida. In 2008, Heather earned her master's degree in U.S. history and graduated with her doctorate in U.S. history in August of 2011. She currently lives happily with her son, Sam, and daughter, Eloise, in a neat, old house in High Springs.