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by

John W. White
For Anne
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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MANAGED COMPLIANCE: WHITE RESISTANCE AND DESEGREGATION IN SOUTH CAROLINA, 1950-1970

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This dissertation aims to reveal the complex history of white resistance to desegregation in South Carolina from 1950 to 1970, a period between the filing of the first federal school desegregation lawsuit, Briggs v. Elliott, and the final failure of overtly racist politics to ensure electoral victory during the gubernatorial election of 1970. Generally, this work contends that historians have underestimated the degree to which physical, legal, and economic pressure were successful in slowing the pace and extent of significant racial change in South Carolina. It also argues that the well-planned bureaucratic roadblocks put in place in the 1950s were instrumental in delaying and minimizing desegregation in the mid-to-late 1960s.

From 1950 to 1963, South Carolina engaged in a multifaceted and flexible massive resistance campaign that was dominated by a policy of managed non-compliance with court ordered desegregation. Rather than face federal intervention and civic unrest, whites adapted South Carolina’s system of racial control in the mid-to-late 1960s to one
that is best described as managed compliance. The dissertation argues that white moderation and acceptance of token desegregation in South Carolina were predicated on maintaining the white economic advantage and preserving a racial balance that heavily favored whites in the state’s public school system. It also demonstrates that the generation that controlled the state in the three decades after World War II did not endorse the concept of racial integration and utilized every available device to protect white privilege and advantages. The dissertation reveals that, as late as 1970, after federal intervention and black political agency rendered the politics and practice of massive resistance impotent, whites retained many of the educational and economic advantages that had allowed white supremacy to flourish in the first place.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In 1950, South Carolina was home to the first federal school desegregation lawsuit, *Briggs v. Elliot*, and yet, it holds the dubious distinction of being the last southern state to end the practice of rigid racial segregation in public education, holding out until 1963. In spite of this lengthy delay, South Carolina is generally recognized for rejecting the kind of hardcore, often violent, resistance that typified white defiance in other Deep South states. According to the limited historical literature on the state’s desegregation crisis, it appears that South Carolina underwent a rapid conversion from being a rigid and inflexible paragon of white supremacy to become a moderate state that orchestrated the most orderly and uneventful desegregation in the region. However, it is also clear from the growing number of dissertations on the African American freedom struggle in South Carolina that racism and intense white resistance to meaningful change persisted for some time after the supposedly peaceful accommodation of civil rights demands in 1963. This dissertation focuses primarily on examining the discrepancy between the notion that South Carolina peacefully shed its Jim Crow past and the evidence suggesting that the basic structures of white privilege remained intact for some time after that conversion.1

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The chronicle of how South Carolina was able to mount the longest and most successful battle against desegregation is complex and multifaceted. Between 1950 and the late 1960s white South Carolinians were united by the fervor to protect white privilege and slow the ever quickening pace of racial change. That is not, however, to say that whites in the state were a monolithic group. Granted, white South Carolinians engaged in “massive resistance” against desegregation, but massive resistance was itself a diverse and intricate phenomenon. The term was first used by Virginia Senator Harry F. Byrd in 1956 and later adopted by historians and contemporary observers to describe white defiance of anti-Jim Crow pressures. It encapsulates a range of tactics, policies, and sentiments shared by southern whites that were at best amorphous expressions of common white anxieties.

Like segregation itself the white resistance movement was an ever changing arrangement between various factions and interests: a process as much as a program. As J. Douglas Smith has recently argued, white southerners needed to manage Jim Crow carefully over time. It was not a fixed entity, but a dynamic system of racial/social control that was adapted to meet the needs of the white population that benefited from it and to counteract various challenges to it from African Americans and their allies. This dissertation demonstrates that, once those challenges became irresistible in the 1950s and 1960s, whites were equally determined to manage the dismantling and replacement of the state’s Jim Crow system in a manner that would also serve white interests.

To date, scholarly attempts to chronicle this process have been few and far between. With this in mind historian Charles Eagles, in a 2000 historiographical essay in the *Journal of Southern History*, issued a call for scholars to produce new investigations
of southern white resistance to desegregation. As Eagles noted, several of the key works
on the topic, such as Numan V. Bartley’s *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and
Politics in the South During the 1950s* and Neil R. McMillen’s *The Citizens’ Council:
Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction*, are now more than 20 years old and
lack the nuance and focus of more contemporary studies of the freedom struggle.

Bartley’s study, much like Francis Wilhoit’s 1973 book *The Politics of Massive
Resistance*, is too focused on elite whites and fails to recognize the extent of grass roots
white participation. McMillen’s work, on the other hand, is narrowly focused on grass
roots activism, but he dramatically underestimates the effectiveness of the White
Citizens’ Councils in the Palmetto State by measuring them against their Mississippi
counterparts without fully explaining the differences between South Carolina’s “sly”
resistance and Mississippi’s more confrontational approach.2

Since the publication of Eagles’s essay several works have begun to examine the
nature of white supremacy and have launched investigations of the legal and extra-legal
measures adopted throughout the South to defend the racial caste system. Both George
Lewis and Jeff Woods, for example, have studied the connection between anti-
communism and the defense of segregation. Like Eagles, both authors recognize that the
complexity of white resistance warrants the same kind of focused inspection that has
characterized scholarly examinations of African American community actions. Lewis’s

*The White South and Red Menace: Segregationists, Anticommunism, and Massive
Resistance*

Resistance, 1945-1965 and Woods’s Black Struggle Red Scare: Segregation and Anti-Communism in the South, 1948-1968 are welcome additions to the study of white resistance. Nevertheless, the narrow topical focus of each work limits its ability to provide an in-depth analysis of white resistance in South Carolina beyond the tactical use of anti-communism.3

Regarding the post-World War II freedom struggle, South Carolina has been the most understudied of all the Deep South states. There has not been a single monographic analysis of the civil rights era in South Carolina published since Howard Quint’s Profile in Black and White in 1958. This is despite the fact that South Carolina was the origin of some of the earliest and most dynamic challenges to the South’s Jim Crow system during the 1940s and home to a vigorous and complex massive resistance movement well into the 1960s. This dissertation offers a long overdue re-interpretation of white legal, political, and extra-legal resistance in the state, placing it in the context of a resourceful and resilient civil rights campaign by South Carolina’s black communities.4


To date, the three most noteworthy examinations of massive resistance to desegregation in South Carolina are Quint’s *Profile in Black and White*, John Sproat’s essay “Firm Flexibility: Perspectives on Desegregation in South Carolina,” and Marcia Synnott’s article “Desegregation in South Carolina, 1950-1963: Sometime Between ‘Now’ and ‘Never’.” Quint’s work, which was published five years before any public school desegregation occurred in South Carolina, is pessimistic about the possibility for a peaceful resolution to the desegregation crisis. The book, which is largely a summary of contemporary journalistic observations, chronicles the state’s reactions to black encroachments on white privilege during the 1950s and concludes that no desegregation would occur in South Carolina without a “catastrophic struggle.” Sproat’s work, on the other hand, praises the state for adopting a policy of “peaceful accommodation” in the 1960s. He argues that moderate white leaders worked with a generally conservative and patient black population to foster slow but peaceful racial progress in the state. Synnott’s work is more nuanced. She acknowledges the influence of Quint and Sproat, but criticizes them for their narrow temporal focus. According to Synnott, Quint’s work provides valuable insight into a period when traditional patterns of race relations were breaking down in South Carolina, but, because it was written during the zenith of militant white resistance, the author did “not anticipate that the state’s political and business leadership would by 1963 peacefully and without federal intervention choose to integrate Clemson College.” Likewise, she concludes that Sproat’s work is also flawed in that it fails to define “how fast and how far white South Carolinians” would permit racial progress to go. Instead, Synnott contends that racial change in South Carolina resulted from a “conservative, controlled ‘evolution’.”

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5 Quint, *Profile in Black and White*, V. John Sproat, “‘Firm Flexibility’: Perspectives on Desegregation in
Synnott’s work is valuable in that she recognizes that changes in white resistance tactics happened gradually and that it is impossible to understand the shift away from militant white resistance without examining the nature and fate of the segregationist political and legal campaigns of the 1950s. However, like Sproat she overemphasizes the significance of the peaceful desegregation of Clemson College and overstresses the importance of both white and black elites in South Carolina’s major cities. Moreover, both Synnott and Sproat adopt the notion, first mentioned in I.A. Newby’s 1973 book *Black Carolinians*, that the black population was generally conservative, citing as evidence what they see as a significant lull in black activism in the late 1950s and the African American acceptance of only gradual, incremental changes in racial arrangements in the mid-late 1960s.  

As Synnott admitted in her 1989 essay, more investigations of the civil rights movement in South Carolina are necessary before scholars can begin to understand the complex process of desegregation in the Palmetto State. The lack of proper study of white resistance still places limits on the ability of historians to understand the political and social landscape of this period of supposed white moderation and consistent black conservatism. Consequently, they have failed to appreciate fully the complex social, 

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economic, and political context within which black activists had to work for meaningful racial progress. Close research into the White Citizens’ Councils, for instance, reveals that the “lull” in civil rights activism detected by Newby was deceptive, as black leaders simply shifted their priorities away from legal challenges to segregation in the late 1950s in response to the specific nature of local defiance by white supremacists. For example, local blacks in Clarendon and Orangeburg Counties may have relaxed the pressure on whites to desegregate during this period, but black organizations were heavily involved in aiding African Americans who faced economic reprisals from white business leaders, employers, and landlords. This kind of aid, especially to blacks whose “activism” made them subject to white economic pressure, was instrumental in creating the supportive environment in which further black mobilization took place. In other words, without understanding the nature and impact of white resistance, it is difficult to explain the agenda of South Carolina’s black activists and civil rights organizations.⁷

Thematically, this dissertation focuses on the variety of forms of resistance to desegregation and full black enfranchisement utilized by white South Carolinians, and on the manner in which whites adopted strategies to deal with the demands of both the federal courts and their own insurgent black citizens for greater civil rights. It is one of the core findings of this dissertation that at no point did the majority of white South Carolinians admit that segregation was either wrong or undesirable. The dissertation also contends that, although the state has routinely been praised for its “moderation” during the civil rights crises of the 1950s and 1960s (most notably by its own political and economic leadership), the generation of white South Carolinians that controlled the state

in the 30 years after World War II never lost faith in white supremacy and made every effort to preserve white privilege and curtail black advancements. Indeed, this study argues that, while the deployment of alternatives to violent resistance helped keep bloodshed in the state to a minimum, it was mostly through luck, poor marksmanship, and inept bomb-making that the Palmetto State enjoys its reputation for peaceful desegregation.

In marshalling the evidence for this contention, this work utilizes a variety of primary and secondary sources. It relies heavily on manuscript collections of state politicians and activists, black and white; and on contemporary newspaper accounts and periodicals. Although hardly offering a balanced guide to the events of the period, the Charleston *News and Courier* was especially helpful in tracing the evolution of white resistance as its editor, Thomas R. Waring, was a devout racial conservative who openly endorsed many of the tenets of massive resistance and advocated for the state to adopt an uncompromising defense of Jim Crow on the pages of the Low Country’s largest and oldest newspaper. The dissertation also makes use of oral history interviews and the contemporary publications of regional organizations, such as the Southern Regional Council and the Southern Education Reporting Service. White electoral behavior, participation in segregationist civic groups, and economic concerns are also analyzed to provide a general sense of white public opinion and to explain the changing nature of white resistance in South Carolina from 1950 to 1970. Although this dissertation is not primarily an examination of the inner workings of the South Carolina civil rights movement, it will demonstrate that the tactics employed by African American activists and their allies shaped and were shaped by the ever changing nature of white resistance to
black demands and progress. The ebb and flow of cause and effect between black activism and white responses was complex and untidy, changing over time and according to locale. Nevertheless, at all times and in all places, there was a reciprocal relationship between black protests and various forms of white power in South Carolina which this dissertation seeks to illuminate.

The most significant problem in researching this topic was that some relevant manuscript collections, such as the Ernest F. Hollings Papers and the Floyd Spence Papers, were not yet available for research. Others, such as the L. Marion Gressette Papers, appear to have been purged of “controversial” materials prior to their donation to archival repositories. And, still others, such as the Burnet R. Maybank Papers and parts of the L. Mendel Rivers Papers are still unorganized and only available with special permission. Although some of these restricted or “lost” materials may have been helpful, there is nonetheless a significant archival record for the period in question. Moreover, much of the important correspondence from the Gressette Commission that seems to be missing from the Gressette collection at Modern Political Collections at the South Caroliniana Library can be found in other manuscript collections.

These sources shed light on the complex history of white resistance to desegregation in South Carolina from 1950 to 1970, a period between the filing of the Briggs case and the final failure of overtly racist politics to ensure electoral victory during the gubernatorial election of 1970. Chapters 1 through 3 discuss the initial white reaction to the increased pace of black activism in South Carolina in the years before 1954. These chapters also take into account the emerging political and economic concerns confronting white South Carolinians and the developing patterns of resistance to
racial change apparent in the white communities. Chapters 4 through 6 are focused on
the state’s reaction to the Supreme Court’s decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and
Chapters 5 and 6 explain the reasons for the eventual dissolution of the hardcore
segregationist coalition that dominated official policy and the public debate on race
during the late 1950s in South Carolina and its transformation into a new segregationist
plurality that was no less committed, but that pursued a more moderate brand of managed
non-compliance with desegregation. The final two chapters discuss the evolution of
white resistance from managed non-compliance to yet more subtle and bureaucratic
forms of opposition to black advance designed to preserve the maximum feasible amount
of white power and privilege compatible with the law and a new era of black voting and
biracial politics. These final chapters also shed light on the political, cultural, and
economic changes that resulted from these adjustments.

In sum, this dissertation contends that historians have underestimated the degree to
which physical, legal, and economic pressures were successful in slowing the pace and
extent of significant racial change in South Carolina. It is the contention of this work that
the well-planned bureaucratic roadblocks put in place in the 1950s were instrumental in
delaying and minimizing desegregation in the mid-to-late 1960s. South Carolina whites
had anticipated federally enforced desegregation and prepared strategies to counter it as
early as 1950. Only after the preservation of total segregation was no longer compatible
with the maintenance of public order and economic growth did white South Carolinians
accept even token desegregation. From 1950 to 1963, South Carolina engaged in a
variety of massive resistance campaigns that were dominated by a policy of managed
non-compliance with court ordered desegregation. Rather than face federal intervention and civic unrest, whites adapted South Carolina’s system of racial control in the mid-to-late 1960s to one that is best described as managed compliance. Even then, the dissertation argues that white moderation and acceptance of token desegregation in South Carolina were predicated on maintaining white economic advantage and preserving a racial balance that heavily favored whites in the state’s public school system.
CHAPTER 2
MANAGING THE SEGREGATION CRISIS: THE EARLY WHITE BACKLASH IN SOUTH CAROLINA

This dissertation is primarily devoted to exploring the origins, nature and effectiveness of white responses to the African American freedom struggle from 1950 to 1970. However, by the mid-1940s, there were already clear signs that white South Carolina was mobilizing considerable resources to combat gathering challenges to the operation of Jim Crow in the Palmetto State. Those tactics would form important precedents for resistance in the 1950s and beyond, and, therefore, warrant attention in this chapter. Comprehending these initial skirmishes over Jim Crow is crucial for understanding the mounting desegregation crisis that would peak in the period between 1956 and 1963.

In July 1943 an African American veteran named John Wrighten and 33 other black students applied for admission to the College of Charleston. The school, which was a publicly supported municipal college, rejected the applicants on the basis of their race. A year later, Wrighten and 32 graduates from the Avery Normal Institute, a private African American secondary school near the College of Charleston, sought admission to the small city college. Again, the students’ applications were rejected. Though the students were denied admission without serious consideration, the affront to Charleston’s long history of segregation in education worried conservative white Charlestonians. In the wake of the Gaines v. Canada verdict in 1938, which required states to integrate their graduate schools or build “equal” facilities for African American students, whites were
concerned that a new legal challenge from black students might result in the
desegregation of the school.¹

The Charleston News and Courier predicted that “the white people cannot and will
not take on an elaborate burden of free schools and colleges for the 814,000 negroes (sic)
in the state.” In response to Wrighten’s attempt to enter the College of Charleston, the
conservative Charleston newspaper went so far as to claim that the court ordered
admission of African American students into white schools would lead to the replacement
of the public school system in South Carolina with a network of private schools, insisting
that although the “negro invasion of [the state’s schools] shall by law cause its
destruction, white school training will greatly improve and cost less.”²

The Charleston Evening Post similarly warned that the attempted desegregation of
the College of Charleston was an “organized” effort “to challenge the city’s educational
system” and “to break down the social, educational and political institutions of the
South.” Charleston’s evening newspaper also promoted privatization as a potential
remedy to court ordered desegregation. Like its sister paper, the News and Courier, the
Evening Post blamed black activists and New Deal politics for the challenge to
Charleston’s racial caste system. “The New Deal,” claimed an editorial, “has scrupled at
nothing to gain the votes of Northern negroes (sic) and white “liberals” to whom the
South’s way is anathema.”³

¹ William Peters, The Southern Temper (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1959) 184-185. News and Courier (June 11, 1944), (June 12, 1944) clippings from the College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections, College of Charleston, South Carolina [Hereafter cited as College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections].

² News and Courier (June 12, 1944) clipping from the College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections.

³ News and Courier (June 12, 1944), Evening Post (June 12, 1944) clippings from the College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections.
The same year that Wrighten mounted his challenge to segregated education in South Carolina, the state’s predominately black Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) also attempted to challenge the seating of the all-white South Carolina delegation to the Democratic National Convention. PDP spokesman and black newspaperman John H. McCray argued that, since South Carolina’s Democratic Primary excluded African Americans while the PDP primary was open to all South Carolinians, the PDP delegation was the only legitimate delegation to the national convention. The request was denied by the convention, but the challenge, like the attempt to desegregate the College of Charleston, was evidence of growing African American demands for equality in South Carolina.4

This increase in black civil rights agitation deeply concerned white South Carolinians. By the mid-1940s it was apparent that black South Carolinians had marshaled considerable resources to combat the state’s separate and unequal racial hierarchy. Between 1944 and 1950 African Americans regularly and openly challenged unequal treatment in public schools and mounted a well-organized attack on Jim Crow politics. In addition to attempts to desegregate the College of Charleston and the formation of the PDP, black activists also assailed unequal pay in the state’s school system. As elsewhere in the South at the time, a number of educators, including a civil rights pioneer from the Charleston County public school system named Septima Clark, sued the state demanding that African American teachers receive the same pay as their white counterparts. In 1945 Federal Judge J. Waties Waring ruled, in Thompson v. 

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Gibbes, that the practice of paying black teachers in South Carolina less than whites violated the “separate but equal” doctrine established by the United States Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.5

The cumulative effect of these new challenges to Jim Crow in South Carolina was to harden white resistance. Whites, especially those in majority black counties like Orangeburg and Clarendon, were fearful at the prospect of African American political power and determined to prevent educational equality. In South Carolina white anxiety was palpable, and resistance to any black progress was immediate at both the popular and official levels. For example, after the federal courts ruled against the white primary in *Smith v. Allwright*, South Carolina’s Governor, Olin D. Johnston, called a special session of the state legislature. During that session, the state eliminated any and all mention of political parties in the South Carolina constitution and the Democratic Party was re-defined as a “private club.” Johnston and leaders in the General Assembly declared that since the political parties were “private” organizations, the Texas case did not apply.6

In addition to these kinds of legislative responses, whites used a variety of formal and informal tactics to resist calls for black civil and political rights. At times, that resistance was violent. White South Carolinians did not take kindly to even the most minor infraction of racial custom. For example, a black World War II veteran named Isaac Woodward was nearly beaten to death during the summer of 1946 while traveling through South Carolina on his way to meet his wife in North Carolina. During his trip,


Woodward quarreled with a white bus driver over what historian John Egerton describes as “a minor point of racial etiquette.” Woodward had asked the driver to stop the bus so he could use the restroom. When he returned the bus driver berated Woodward for taking too long. After arguing with the driver, Woodward returned to his seat. The driver, however, was furious with what he saw as Woodward’s insolence and lack of deference and called ahead to authorities in Batesburg, a small town northwest of Columbia, to ask for assistance in dealing with the “unruly” African American. When he exited the bus in Batesburg, Woodward was apprehended by local Police Chief Linwood Shull and a white deputy. The two men took Woodward behind the bus station and beat him severely. Woodward awoke the next day blinded for life by the assault.7

Notwithstanding such brutal episodes, violent repression was not, however, as prevalent in South Carolina as it was in some other Deep South states. More often, whites utilized a more subtle, but no less effective approach to preserving Jim Crow and white power. For example, soon after his request for admission to the College of Charleston was denied, John Wrighten was summoned to Columbia for a physical examination. He had been discharged from the army with a peptic ulcer. As a result of his ailment, Wrighten drew a 10 percent disability pension from the military. After the examination, Wrighten was informed that the ulcer was completely healed. Therefore, local military administrators ordered an end to his pension payments. Despite his clean bill of health, Wrighten continued to experience painful symptoms. After checking

himself into the Charleston Naval Hospital, Wrighten was transferred to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Columbia. Again, he was told that X-rays showed no sign of an ulcer. Only after a persistent letter writing campaign to President Harry S. Truman and South Carolina Senator Olin D. Johnston was Wrighten correctly diagnosed and his pension restored. The incident epitomized the ways in which whites combined their control of government bureaucracies with flagrant falsifications to exert economic pressure over blacks, especially “activist” ones who dared to challenge the racial status quo. 8

As the Wrighten incident illustrated, even before the zenith of white resistance in the 1950s and 1960s, white South Carolinians used every tactic at their disposal to quell black challenges to Jim Crow. For instance, in 1949, when James Hinton, the President of the South Carolina National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACCP), warned that his organization was planning on testing the College of Charleston’s policy of racial segregation in federal court, the white reaction was swift and decisive. Before the NAACP could even prepare a case, the city of Charleston sold the college and all of its property to the Board of Trustees for one dollar. If the college became a private institution, college President George Grice reasoned, the NAACCP had no case against its admission policy. 9

Despite these kinds of legal and extra-legal reprisals, African Americans persisted with their demands for civil and voting rights. Wrighten, for example, following his rejection from the College of Charleston had attended the segregated South Carolina


9 Undated and Untitled news clippings from the College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections.
State College in Orangeburg from where he applied for admission to the state’s only public law school at the University of South Carolina. Two weeks before his graduation from South Carolina State in July 1946, Wrighten’s application was rejected on the basis of his race. Though he was disappointed, Wrighten was determined to continue his fight for admission to law school. With support from Hinton and the South Carolina NAACP, he filed a federal lawsuit, and, in 1947, federal Judge Waring declared that the state had three options: it could admit Wrighten to the law school at the University of South Carolina, close any publicly funded law school in South Carolina, or build a comparable school for black students at South Carolina State. Rather than close or desegregate the state’s only law school, the General Assembly allocated funds to construct a law college at South Carolina State.10

Wrighten’s limited success, as well as a series of legal victories against segregation throughout the South, emboldened South Carolina’s small community of civil rights activists. The South Carolina branch of the NAACP continued to chip away at *du jure* segregation and challenged South Carolina’s white primary in federal court in 1947. In *Rice v. Elmore* and *Brown v. Baskin*, Judge Waring ruled that the *Smith v. Allwright* decision effectively outlawed South Carolina’s white primary, and that the privatization of political parties was an unconstitutional attempt to avoid compliance with the federal verdict.11

Waring, however, understood that his rulings were meaningless unless the national government demanded that local white officials enforced the verdicts. Moreover, he

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recognized that white South Carolinians were, for the most part, united in their commitment to segregation, if not necessarily in their preferred methods of preserving the status quo. Therefore, Waring later told a New York audience that racial change in the South would require “outside assistance.” “The problem,” he declared, “is to change the feeling, the sentiment, the creed of the great body of white people of the South that a Negro is not an American citizen.” Waring understood that southern whites had a deep cultural commitment to white supremacy. “My people have one outstanding fault,” he concluded, “the terrible fault of prejudice.” According to the judge, southerners had “been born and educated to feel that a Negro is some kind of animal that ought to be well-treated and given kindness, but as a matter of favor, not right.”

Waring and South Carolina’s other civil rights advocates understood that whites were particularly concerned at the creeping threat of federal intervention to enforce black rights. Of course, the judge and other like minded activists also recognized that the best opportunities for rapid change would demand an active federal role. In the fall of 1947 President Harry S. Truman’s civil rights commission simultaneously gave hope to African Americans and increased white anxieties when it issued a report entitled *To Secure These Rights*. The report called for “a sweeping denunciation of all government and some private sanctions of race discrimination or segregation.” It was immediately condemned by southern leaders. For example, L. Mendel Rivers, who represented South Carolina’s First District in the United States House of Representatives, called the report a “brazen and monumental insult to the Democratic South and the southern way of life for both white and colored.” He demanded that the South “be left alone and freed from

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agitation by the northern political hitch-hikers who” wanted to use the region “as a guinea pig for their screwball, crackpot plans and ideologies.” Rivers insisted, “for me and the people I represent, no negro (sic) born is on my social level.”

Southerners like Rivers, however, no longer held the balance of power in the national Democratic Party. Before 1936 two-thirds of the delegates at the Democratic National Convention had to agree on a candidate before that candidate was eligible to represent the party as its nominee for the presidency. There was no real controversy when Franklin D. Roosevelt was nominated in 1940 or in 1944, but the election of 1948 was the first since the death of the popular New Dealer. Much to the chagrin of southern whites, northern activists within the party were determined to make civil rights an important issue at the national convention. Without the “veto” power of the two-thirds rule, southerners were unable to stop them. Consequently, at the Democratic Convention of 1948, the party adopted a pro-civil rights platform. Its platform called on the party to fight “racial, religious and economic discrimination” and stated that the Democrats believed “that racial and religious minorities must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote, the full and equal protection of the laws, on the basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution.” The convention also commended President Truman for his interests in enforcing civil rights and urged Congress to support the president in the call for an end to racial discrimination.

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The call for civil rights enforcement infuriated conservative southern whites, who made no effort to mask their displeasure with Democratic Party leaders. Handy Ellis, the leader of the Alabama delegation, led his fellow Alabamians off the convention floor. One southern delegate paid the band to play “Dixie” as the Mississippi delegation exited the building with other southern whites who bolted the convention twirling confederate flags and kicking over “Truman for President” signs. Three days after the convention ended 6000 whites gathered in Birmingham, Alabama to declare their defiance of President Truman and the national Democratic Party.\(^{15}\)

The rebellious southern “delegates” introduced a “Declaration of Principles” condemning Truman’s “infamous and iniquitous program [of] equal access to all places of public accommodation for persons of all races, colors, creeds, and national origins.” The declaration was followed by an announcement that the group had nominated South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurmond and Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright as presidential and vice presidential candidates, respectively, on the States’ Rights (or Dixiecrat as it was popularly known) Party ticket.\(^{16}\)

The Dixiecrat revolt divided state Democratic parties across the South and southern politicians were undecided as to which faction to support in the general election. In South Carolina, the loyalist wing of the party was dominated by United States Senator Olin D. Johnston, State Senator Edgar Brown, and Speaker of the State House of Representatives Sol Blatt. Most of the South Carolina’s other leading politicians, such as United States Senator Burnet R. Maybank, chose to endorse the state Democratic Party

\(^{15}\) *Time* (July 26, 1948) 13.

\(^{16}\) *Ibid.*
but avoided either a public endorsement or open criticism of the national party. Others, such as Rivers, joined the growing chorus of Thurmond supporters. Eventually, the States’ Rights Party received the official endorsement of the Democratic Party in South Carolina, just as it did in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana.¹⁷

Thurmond and his Dixiecrat supporters hoped to capture all 127 of the South’s electoral votes and deny both Truman and Republican candidate Thomas Dewey victory. In that case, the election would have been decided by the United States House of Representatives. However, this strategy failed and Thurmond was only able to win 39 electoral votes. The Dixiecrat won in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama overwhelmingly. He also won in Louisiana with 52 percent of the popular vote. In each of the states where the Thurmond-Wright ticket was victorious, Thurmond had replaced Truman on the ballot and was listed as the official nominee of the Democratic Party.¹⁸

For many, Thurmond’s inability to build a consensus across the South was an indication that white frustration with civil rights victories had not yet reached a boiling point. However, in South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama Thurmond had scored a decisive victory and won the loyalty of the party regulars at the state conventions. Moreover, his success in those states was a warning that the preservation of segregation and the defense of the South’s Jim Crow system was a potent campaign issue. It was also an indication that, in the Deep South states, committed segregationists would go to extraordinary lengths to prevent the formation of a moderate biracial coalition. In sum, the election results encapsulated the intensification of white anxiety that was to become


the hallmark of white southern politics during the next decade. Moreover, it was an early indication that, as South Carolina’s white and black populations entered the 1950s, the debate over whether or not to preserve the legal and cultural mechanisms for enforcing racial segregation would become the dominate social issue.

For many black South Carolinians, the coming decade promised an end to the indignities of southern segregation. Nearly a century after the end of slavery and over 50 years after the *Plessy* decision codified *de jure* segregation, civil rights leaders had finally won a series of legal battles against white supremacy that both inspired and energized black activism throughout the South. However, whites had already reacted to this progress with the kind of opposition that would come to characterize the region’s massive resistance to forced desegregation. Therefore, in spite of this newfound determination and guarded confidence that change would come, the challenges confronting South Carolina’s civil rights advocates in 1950 remained daunting. Years before 1956, when Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia issued his call for “massive resistance” to federally mandated desegregation, South Carolina whites began to implement a complex legislative and extra-legal agenda to maintain and manage white supremacy and limit African American political and economic power. Whites were resolute in their desire to
protect the racial status quo, mounting a determined effort to forestall court ordered
desegregation at the voting booths, in public spaces, and in the public school systems.¹⁹

During the late 1940s and early 1950s the most serious challenges to racial
segregation in South Carolina originated in sparsely populated Clarendon County, a rural
enclave northwest of Charleston that was in the heart of the state’s black belt. In 1948, a
group of African Americans led by Reverend Joseph DeLaine and a farmer named Levi
Pearson brought a suit against the county demanding that it provide bus transportation to
black public school children. Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund
argued that, since the local school board already provided bus transportation for white
students, the county was in violation of the United States Supreme Court’s “separate but
equal” decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. The case, which was brought against
Clarendon County District 26 on behalf of Pearson’s son James, met with immediate
resistance from whites. Clarendon County Superintendent of Schools L.B. McCord, the
superintendent of District 26, and the county auditor informed Pearson that his taxes had
been paid to Clarendon School District Five, and therefore, the case was invalid. Even
though Pearson and several members of his family living on the same property had tax
receipts from District 26, Marshall decided that his legal team could not win the case. He
claimed that he could not overcome the fact that Pearson, who was the lone plaintiff, had

¹⁹ For the best analysis of the NAACP’s legal strategy and black aspirations during the civil rights era, see:
Stephen Lowe, “The Magnificent Fight: Civil Rights Litigation in South Carolina Federal Courts, 1940-
NAACP’s Legal Campaign Against Segregation in Charleston, South Carolina, 1935-1975” (Ph.D.
Territory: The Politics of Civil Rights Struggle in South Carolina During the Jim Crow Era” (Ph.D.
Dissertation: Rutgers University, 2002). For examples of how segregation was locally controlled, see,
John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois
Press, 2002).
been gerrymandered out of the district. On June 8, 1948, only a day before the case was scheduled to be heard in federal court, Marshall asked for a dismissal. The presiding judge in the case, J. Waties Waring, ruled that Pearson had no standing to sue district 26 in federal court. It was not the last time that gerrymandering would serve to undermine black aspirations in South Carolina.\(^\text{20}\)

Throughout the next year DeLaine, Pearson, and other black parents in Clarendon County continued to demand better treatment of their children within South Carolina’s system of segregated education. For his efforts, DeLaine was fired from his post as principal of the all-black Scott’s Branch School. After an unsuccessful attempt to return to his job, DeLaine and a small group of black activists filed a petition in 1949 demanding that Clarendon County provide equal facilities to black and white students. With the support of the state NAACP and South Carolina civil rights pioneer Modjeska Simkins, DeLaine and the petitioners promised that, if the county did not rectify the disparity between the black and white schools in Clarendon County District 22 (Summerton), they would file a federal lawsuit demanding that the district comply with the precedent established in the \textit{Plessy} case. When the district refused to address the issue, Marshall and a black Columbia attorney named Harold Boulware filed a federal lawsuit in May 1950. The case, \textit{Briggs v. Elliott}, took its name from the first two petition signers, Harry and Eliza Briggs. At first it called for Clarendon County to equalize its segregated schools, but in the fall of 1950 it was amended to challenge \textit{de jure}

segregation directly. At the behest of Waring, Marshall filed a brief alleging that segregation per se was inherently unequal and therefore unconstitutional.\textsuperscript{21}

In 1958, political scientist Howard Quint wrote that whites had been slow to react to the intensification of black activism in Clarendon County. He noted that it was not until January 1951 that the state legislature began to take measures to counteract the threat posed by DeLaine and his supporters in the county. Although the official state response in 1951 did represent an escalation of white resistance at the statewide level, it is important to stress that at the local level resistance had been growing for several years. Even before Pearson and DeLaine petitioned school officials to provide bus transportation for black students, whites in Clarendon County had little tolerance for any kind of African American activism. By the time the South Carolina General Assembly initiated a series of laws designed to undermine the Briggs case in 1951 and 1952 local whites had already unleashed a wave of intimidation in Clarendon County.\textsuperscript{22}

White supremacy was firmly entrenched in Clarendon County in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Local whites controlled government agencies, the banking and crop lien system, and black education. In fact, Clarendon County was one of the most dramatic examples of the inequity between whites and blacks in the nation. Many observers noted that it seemed untouched by the surge of mechanized farming that swept through the


\textsuperscript{22} Quint, \textit{Profile in Black and White},” 21-37.
South in the post-World War II period. Instead, most of Clarendon County resembled the agricultural lands of the nineteenth century. The landscape was dotted with small plots farmed by sharecroppers and its few small towns were populated by a large number of black day laborers and domestics. Much like black belt regions throughout the Deep South, it was closely controlled by white rural elites who did not tolerate violations of racial custom, let alone direct assaults on segregation.  

African Americans represented 70 percent of the total population in Clarendon County in 1950, and yet whites owned 85 percent of the land. Over two-thirds of the black population earned less than $1000 a year and no African American earned more than $2000 per year. According to contemporary author Richard Kluger, blacks lived under a system of “economic slavery, an unbreakable cycle of poverty” which was perpetuated by white educational and economic advantages. Even though there were over 6,000 black students in the county compared to just over 2,000 whites, the state allocated $100,000 more to pay for the education of whites. Due in part to that unequal distribution of resources, white schools had indoor plumbing; black schools did not. According to Judge Waring, African American schools were “just tumbledown, dirty shacks with horrible outdoor toilet facilities.”

It was within this context of educational and economic advantage that whites exerted pressure on “troublesome” blacks. Even before Briggs v. Elliott was filed, two agriculture teachers were fired for simply signing the equalization petition and Harry

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Briggs and fellow veteran William Stukes were denied admission to night classes held at Scott’s Branch School for former GIs. Historian Julie Lochbaum argues that crop lien debts were called in at Christmas, credit was denied to farmers, and cotton gins refused to purchase cotton from the petitioners at fair market price.25

In response to his leadership role in organizing the petitions and encouraging lawsuits against the school system, Joseph DeLaine was threatened by the Ku Klux Klan and forced to post armed guards at his home. He was also sued for slander for his renunciations of a local school official, which resulted in a $2,700 judgment against him. In addition to firing DeLaine, the county sacked his wife, his niece, and his two sisters from their public school teaching jobs. In the fall of 1951, the threats and political pressure also led church authorities to transfer DeLaine to an A.M.E church almost 50 miles away in Lake City. Shortly after the DeLaine family moved, their home in Summerton, which still contained most of their possessions, was burned to the ground. Local fire officials argued that the home was 20 feet outside of city limits and refused to try to contain the blaze. In addition to the loss of most of the family’s belongings, the DeLaine’s insurance company refused to pay a claim on the property. Instead, the money was used to settle the $2,700 judgment against the minister.26

Angry whites also singled out the other petitioners for economic reprisals. Harry Briggs, a World War II veteran, was fired from a job at a local gas station after 14 years of employment. His wife, Eliza, was released from her custodial job at a Summerton motel. When the family attempted to make ends meet by becoming sharecroppers, they

were denied credit and local gin operators refused to purchase the cotton they did manage to grow. According to Kluger, the local sheriff even arrested Harry Briggs’s cow after it wandered off the family’s land. Briggs, who remained steadfast in his support of the NAACP, eventually had to go to Sumter, South Carolina and then to Florida for work. He and his family eventually ended up New York, unemployed and penniless as a result of the economic reprisals. “So many of the people,” remembered Eliza Briggs, “were living on a white man’s place. So they had to move or else take their name off the petition.”

Numerous other individuals also saw their employment terminated. Maids, mechanics, service station attendants, and even teachers were fired for their support of the Clarendon petition. Massie Solomon, a local maid, was fired and her sharecropping family was evicted from the land it farmed. Annie Gibson, a Clarendon domestic worker, was also fired. Like Solomon, she was forced to leave her rented home. John Edwards, who was a veteran of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, was denied credit for farm equipment and Willie Stukes was fired from his job as a mechanic. Stukes attempted to continue working from his home, but did not have the proper equipment to work safely on automobiles and was crushed to death under a car. Beyond those who signed the petition,

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at the time simple membership in the NAACP meant the loss of home and occupation for many Clarendon blacks.\textsuperscript{28}

Like his fellow activists, Levi Pearson faced the full brunt of white economic intimidation. Joseph DeLaine’s nephew, Billie Fleming, later recalled that Pearson’s credit was “completely stopped.” According to Fleming, “Cotton gins refused to gin his cotton. He was not able to borrow money . . . Fertilizer dealers refused to sell him, even for cash money, fertilizer. Oil distributors refused to deliver oil.” When Pearson sought to supplement his income by selling the timber growing on his land, a group of angry whites intervened. They approached the potential buyer of Pearson’s lumber and threatened to ostracize him and “completely cut [him] off from the white community” if he followed through with the purchase. The buyer backed off and Pearson’s fresh cut timber was left on the ground where it fell.\textsuperscript{29}

Despite the effects of this wave of intimidation, the federal lawsuit against Clarendon County helped spark a second petition in Dorchester County, where the NAACP also asked for an end to discrimination against African American school children. The Dorchester suit was brought on behalf of over 200 students and their parents in District 18 of the county. Lawyers for the children claimed they were “deprived of their Constitutional rights to equal protection of the laws and to freedom from discrimination because of race or color.” They were seeking “educational advantages and facilities equal in all respects to that which is being provided for whites.”

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Will the Circle Be Unbroken?: A Personal History of the Civil Rights Movement in Five Southern Communities. Episode 3: Under Color of Law, Columbia, South Carolina.
Along with the suits in Dorchester and Clarendon Counties, James M. Hinton noted that similar lawsuits were being prepared for Lee, Fairfield, and Orangeburg Counties.\footnote{News and Courier (May 16, 1950) 1A. Lighthouse and Informer, (May 20, 1950) 1, from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.}

Many white South Carolinians were educated about the threat that these lawsuits posed to white supremacy on the pages of the state’s most conservative daily newspaper. In a series of front-page editorials commencing on January 2, 1950 in the Charleston News and Courier, William Workman warned white readers that the Supreme Court’s pending decision in Sweatt v. Painter could provide a precedent for desegregating the public school system in South Carolina. Although the Sweatt case involved the constitutionality of the segregated law school at the University of Texas, Workman wrote that “it could have originated anywhere in the South.” Like South Carolina, Texas had constructed a “separate but equal” law school to avoid integrating the all-white institution, but an African American mailman named Herman Sweatt had challenged this maneuver in court. Workman pointed out that the plaintiff’s attorneys contended that “separation itself” was discriminatory. Furthermore, he quoted the attorney general of Texas, who cautioned all southerners that the “petitioner is asking for a court decision which would apply to high schools and elementary schools as well.”\footnote{News and Courier (January 2, 1950) 1.}

In the second editorial of the series, Workman reminded his readers that John Wrighten’s legal challenge had led to the creation of a segregated law school at the “South Carolina Agricultural and Mechanical college for negroes.” Workman pointed out that Wrighten’s case had not only resulted in the formation of a school of law at South Carolina State, but was enormously expensive for South Carolina taxpayers.
Under a court order from Judge Waring, the state appropriated $200,000 for the creation of the new school. Workman cautioned that several other challenges to the state’s segregated university system were in the planning phase, and noted that a school equalization case had emerged in Clarendon County.32

Workman’s editorials were a wake up call to white voters who were still coming to grips with the loss of the white primary and the liberal turn of the national Democratic Party on racial issues. The combination of black demands for voting rights and African American challenges to segregated education led to a marked increase in white racial anxieties. Rank and file whites may not have understood the particulars of the Clarendon County school desegregation case, but they did have a general understanding that the basic framework of the state’s system of Jim Crow laws was under attack. By 1951, most white South Carolinians wanted more concerted action to protect *de jure* segregation from these assaults. For decades, racial separation had been managed locally but was legitimized by state law. Over the course of the next two years, whites intensified their efforts to preserve the racial caste system through a variety of local efforts while at the same time insisting that their actions receive legislative endorsements from the state capitol. The lesson of Clarendon County was that extra-legal actions, economic intimidation, and physical violence could impede black protests, but could not completely eliminate local civil rights activism. Most South Carolina whites agreed that the defense of white supremacy would require a full battery of official action to compliment the informal measures enacted by local whites.

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In an era of Cold War anxieties, anti-communism was a predictable weapon in the arsenal of white resistors. In May 1950, State Representative Joseph R. Wise asked United States Congressman L. Mendel Rivers to investigate whether or not state NAACP leaders were also members of communist organizations. “I was told four days ago in Columbia,” Wise informed Rivers, “that [James] Hinton held a ‘red card’ in 1935.” Rivers took full advantage of the rising tide of anti-communism and investigated Wise’s claim. The congressman telephoned Louis J. Russell, a senior investigator with the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), to request information on Hinton. Russell forwarded a copy of the committee’s file on the civil rights leader. The report cited Hinton as a sponsor of the Congress on Civil Rights, an organization founded in 1946 when the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties and the International Labor Defense merged. According to the HUAC, the Congress was “dedicated not to the broader issues of civil liberties, but specifically to the defense of individuals who are either members of the Communist Party or openly loyal to it.” Furthermore, the association was cited as “subversive and Communist” by Attorney General Tom Clark.33

Rivers forwarded a copy of the Un-American Activities Committee report to Representative Wise and South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond. The congressman

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suggested Thurmond might wish to “expose this negro [sic] when he starts attacking you, as he has been doing.” Rivers also collected HUAC reports on civil rights advocates Clifford J. Durr, Lillian Smith, and Myles Horton as well as on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare. Rivers’s actions were indicative of his ability to gather “secret” information about civil rights activists and were reflective of the intricate network of segregation advocates that existed in the South. Moreover, it demonstrated the ability of committed segregationists to share information and exchange advice about tactics with one another.34

Shortly after Rivers sent Hinton’s HUAC file to Wise, the state legislator publicly charged that Hinton was affiliated with the Communist Party. On the floor of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Wise read the report and asked that it be printed in the *Journal of the House of Representatives of South Carolina*. Hinton vigorously denied the charges. He claimed the Civil Rights Congress was an organization whose aims “were to secure civil rights for all Americans,” and argued those goals remained a worthy cause even if the organization itself had taken a turn to the political left. Hinton decried the trend of labeling all civil rights leaders as communist. “It has become fashionable to label all Negroes as Reds, or radicals if they speak out for first class citizenship,” he said.35


Most whites refused to take Hinton’s cries of innocence seriously. The HUAC report obtained by Rivers gave the charges of communism an air of respectability and seemed to validate state action against the NAACP and other black organizations. The widespread acceptance of Wise’s claims meant that South Carolina segregationists were free to use charges of communism as justification for further intimidation of the state’s African American population and against the handful of “treasonous” whites who supported black aspirations. Labeling an African American leader a communist meant that any progressive white leader who allied himself/herself with the black freedom struggle risked his/her standing in the community. The Second Red Scare suffocated free speech throughout the nation, but the atmosphere of repression was especially disruptive to civil rights advocates in the South.36

As the character assassination of Hinton demonstrated, powerful white South Carolinians, such as Rivers and Wise, were adept at using their control of state bureaucracies to intimidate and threaten black leaders. Though such attacks were numerous in South Carolina, none was more significant than the campaign of intimidation directed at Progressive Democratic Party founder John McCray. Amidst the furor over the Clarendon school desegregation case and the charges of a communist conspiracy within the South Carolina NAACP, McCray was charged with libel in Greenwood County for a story that ran in the state’s largest African American newspaper, The Lighthouse and Informer. McCray, who was the paper’s editor and publisher, was indicted in January 1950 for publishing a story about an African American convicted of raping a white woman. Although McCray never published the young woman’s name, he

36 For examples, see: Lewis, The White South and Red Menace and Woods, Black Struggle Red Scare.
did print the claims of the accused rapist, Willie Tolbert, that the sex was consensual. In
the racially charged atmosphere of South Carolina in the 1950s the story was considered
an assault on white womanhood and a violation of one of segregation’s most sacred
tenets: in cases of interracial sex, black men were routinely depicted as oversexed
predators victimizing chaste white women. As far as whites were concerned, consensual
interracial sex involving a black man and a white women simply did not happen.
Moreover, whites supposed that African Americans, such as McCray, were prohibited
from commenting on any sex acts involving black men and white women and McCray
paid the price for breaking that taboo even though a similar story appeared in the white
owned *Anderson Independent*. The woman’s father, a Greenwood County solicitor,
charged that McCray had published false and libelous statements that defamed the
character of the victim.37

McCray was advised in the case by Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg of the
NAACP Legal Defense Fund and by local black lawyer Harold Boulware. Since McCray
was unlikely to receive the benefit of any doubt from a white jury, his legal counsel
advised him to enlist the aid of a white lawyer for his defense – though even this would
be unlikely to sway an all-white jury. He approached several white attorneys, but was
turned away. One unnamed white attorney did assist with McCray’s defense, but he

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McCray Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia [Hereafter cited as
McCray Papers, SCL].
insisted that his participation in the case be kept secret and would only meet with McCray, Greenberg, or Boulware at night.\textsuperscript{38}

Despite having solid grounds for a defense, Marshall and McCray’s lawyers urged him to accept a plea agreement. The attorneys agreed that an African American defendant who was a known “agitator” was unlikely to receive a fair trial in South Carolina. Pleading guilty, they argued, would keep McCray out of jail and allow him to continue publishing the \textit{Lighthouse and Informer}. McCray heeded their advice and entered a guilty plea in exchange for a sentencing agreement with the Greenwood County prosecutor. As part of that agreement, McCray was fined $3,000, given three years probation, and forced to admit his “guilt” on the front page of the \textit{Lighthouse and Informer}.\textsuperscript{39}

McCray’s brush with the legal system was an important indication of the degree to which whites controlled the state’s bureaucracy and utilized official state agencies to subdue “troublesome” blacks. The conviction was an obvious attempt to discourage McCray from engaging in political activism and a reminder to middle class African Americans that their relative prosperity was dependent on staying in the good graces of the white power structure. McCray, however, continued to engage in the kind of political activism that had drawn the ire of whites in the first place. He campaigned for more progressive candidates in the elections of 1950 and was a vocal supporter of the plaintiffs


\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Ibid.} \textit{The State of South Carolina v. John H. McCray} (June 20, 1950), General Sessions Court, Greenwood County, South Carolina.
in *Briggs v. Elliott*. As a consequence of his continued activism McCray’s parole was revoked in 1951 for giving a political speech in Illinois. McCray claimed that he had been given permission to travel outside of South Carolina for the event, but the state argued that his trip was an unauthorized violation of his parole agreement and sentenced him to serve on a chain gang from November 1951 to December 18, 1952. McCray later claimed that his arrest resulted from a direct order from South Carolina Governor James F. Byrnes who was outraged by the African American’s civil rights activities.  

Although they were rarely confronted with the kind of intimidation directed at politically active blacks, racially progressive whites also faced harsh treatment for advocating better treatment of African Americans. For example, after Judge Waring ordered an end the white primary and became openly critical of segregation he endured a near constant stream of criticism, intimidation, and social ostracism from his segregationist neighbors. White anxiety became even more palpable after Waring’s involvement in the Clarendon County school desegregation case became clear.  

Nonetheless, the hostility directed toward Waring paled in comparison to the attacks levied at his wife, Elizabeth. After all, it was Elizabeth who many white elites blamed for the judge’s late conversion to the cause of civil rights. Shortly before Waring’s judicial decisions began to dismantle *de jure* segregation in South Carolina, he

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had divorced his Charlestonian first wife to marry Elizabeth, a native northerner. Soon after, the Warings became social outcasts in Charleston’s close knit high society.  

In January 1950 Elizabeth Waring spoke at the Annual Meeting of the traditionally all-black Coming Street Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) to a mixed-race audience of over 150. Aside from breaking the social mores regarding race mixing, Mrs. Waring openly attacked the South’s racial caste system and defended her husband’s attempts to break down Jim Crow in South Carolina. In doing so she challenged the notion that Jim Crow was necessary, first and foremost, to protect of white women. Waring’s participation in desegregated meetings and her commitment to racial equality was contrary to white notions about how race and gender rules operated in South Carolina and the South as a whole.

For white South Carolinians, especially “Old Charleston” elites, Elizabeth Waring’s willingness to speak out against segregation was not only wrong-headed, but an unladylike transgression into the world of politics. In the YWCA speech, Mrs. Waring declared that segregationists were “stupid” and claimed that white leaders were afraid that her civil rights activism would “destroy their selfish and savage white supremacy way of life.” The outspoken advocate of integration equated southern use of the filibuster to defeat civil rights legislation to treason. “The White Supremacists . . . are so self-centered,” said Waring, “that they are drawing walls around themselves so close and high that they have become completely isolated from the rest of the world and have not considered themselves part of the country since the Civil War.” She went on to call

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42 Ibid.

43 News and Courier (January 17, 1950) 8.
segregationists “decadent”, prideful, “morally weak,” and “confused.” Waring even called on civil rights activists to stand up to the “Dixiecrat Gestapo.”44

State Representative Joseph Wise summarized the view of most white South Carolinians regarding Elizabeth Waring when he declared that the state did not need a lecture from a “Damn Yankee.” The Warings received telephoned death threats and were denounced by state leaders. In February 1950, the state House of Representatives passed a resolution promising that “the necessary funds be allocated to purchase a one-way ticket to any point in the United States of America or preferably a foreign country for Federal Judge J. Waties Waring and his socialite wife. . . with the sole provision they leave the State of South Carolina and never again set foot on her soil.” The resolution also committed $800,000 to build an animal science building on the campus of Clemson College, and suggested the school dedicate a stall in the mule barn for the Warings. Although the resolution was quashed in the state Senate, it represented a sentiment shared by many angry whites in South Carolina who tended to view all civil rights activism as orchestrated by outsiders who threatened the virtue of white democracy in the Palmetto State.45

Even when faced with threats and ostracism, the Warings refused to curtail their activism. Mrs. Waring went on NBC’s “Meet the Press” to defend her position. She also reiterated her denunciation of segregation in an interview with Colliers magazine. In


response to her call for immediate integration, Senator Burnet Maybank invoked charges of communism against the Warings and asked Peyton Ford, an Assistant to the Attorney General of the United States to investigate Waring’s wife for advocating a “revolution” to bring about an end to segregation. Maybank told Ford that the civil rights activities of the Warings “amounts to persecution of respectable people, whether they be black or white, and I think the Justice Department should look into the matter.” A month later, Maybank wrote to Attorney General J. Howard McGrath requesting an investigation of the couple.46

Maybank’s demand went unanswered, but many of his constituents refused to give up on the crusade against the unpopular judge and his wife. J.C. Phillips, a retired merchant marine, launched a petition drive demanding the impeachment of Judge Waring. At a closed-door meeting in March 1950 in the office of First District Representative L. Mendel Rivers, Phillips claimed to have almost 21,000 signatures demanding action from Congress. The meeting was attended by each of the state’s representatives in the House except for James P. Richards and John L. McMillan, and all of the participants agreed not to share information about the proceedings with the media. However, one observer admitted that the group did not have the necessary evidence to proceed. “We certainly can’t impeach him for making pro-negro speeches,” claimed the unidentified source.47


47 News and Courier (March 9, 1950) 1B.
Phillips was joined in the meeting by Dr. Charles D. Leverett, a Charleston Dentist; L. Eddie Heinson, a Dorchester County magistrate; A.A. Jordan, an Aiken lumberman; W. Lee Cooper, a Pelion farmer and merchant; and V.M. Wingard, a farmer from Lexington. Together, this economically and geographically diverse group promised to form a “sort of Southern association for the advancement of white people.” According to Phillips, the new organization would be dedicated to countering pressure from minority groups and protecting traditional southern society. Before his organization could form, however, Phillips’s worst fears were realized: in December 1950 African Americans in Clarendon County amended Briggs v. Elliott to challenge the very legality of segregation in education.48

The white reaction to the case placed incredible pressure on South Carolina’s political elites to defend the basic framework of the racial hierarchy. With arguments in Briggs v. Elliott set for May 1951, South Carolina’s state government initiated an urgent attempt to head off a court decision that threatened to erode white power and fundamentally undermine de jure segregation. Under the leadership of newly elected governor James F. Byrnes, the state launched a concerted effort to defend the legality of its Jim Crow schools. Byrnes was South Carolina’s most well known political leader. He had served as a United States Senator, a United States Supreme Court Justice, and as Secretary of State under Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman. Despite his position as a leader in Roosevelt’s New Deal government, however, he did not share the socially progressive outlook of other leading New Dealers, such as Henry Wallace. Instead, Byrnes was a committed racial conservative who had no intention of

volunteering to dismantle South Carolina’s system of racial separation. Moreover, he had widespread support from the state’s white population and a reputation as an able leader. Most whites assumed that Byrnes would find a solution to the “segregation problem” that would not result in an end to Jim Crow in South Carolina.49

Governor Byrnes surmised that South Carolina’s best hope for preventing or, at least, delaying a federal desegregation order was to give the impression that the state was in compliance with Plessy’s “separate but equal” doctrine. Therefore, he launched a school equalization initiative that preceded similar programs in other southern states by almost two years. School equalization, according to Byrnes, would halt federal interference in South Carolina’s system of de jure segregation and limit civil rights activism in the state. He outlined his plan in an address to the South Carolina House of Representatives in January 1951. In his speech Byrnes pledged to “find a lawful way of educating South Carolina’s children” while “providing separate schools for the races.” He called on the state legislature to pass a three-cent sales tax to finance equalization and new school construction and promised that, even though a large portion of the funds would be spent on educating African Americans, the new tax would actually strengthen institutional segregation.50

With the equalization plan, Byrnes established a blueprint for white resistance to black advancement in South Carolina that would last for more than a decade. He pledged his commitment to segregation, but demanded respect for the rule of law. Byrnes failed

49 For a discussion of Byrnes’s political career, see: David Robertson, Sly and Able: A Political Biography of James F. Byrnes (New York: Norton, 1994).

to appreciate that, at some point, the two might become incompatible. The governor promised a legal remedy, but assured South Carolina voters that “what a carpetbag government could not do in the reconstruction period, cannot be done in this period.” If the federal courts ordered desegregation, Byrnes promised to close the schools rather than integrate them. He claimed that “the majority of colored people in the state do not want to force their children into white schools.” Instead, Byrnes concluded that black Carolinians only wanted whites to “see to it that innocent colored children will not be denied an education because of selfish politicians and misguided agitators.”51

Byrnes’s plan was to provide better treatment for South Carolina’s black population within the Jim Crow system, but his proposal did have an important corollary. If black activists continued to press for desegregation or if the federal government attempted to force an end to the racial caste system, South Carolina was prepared to take radical action and abandon public schooling altogether. Byrnes and other state leaders warned that any attempt to break down the barriers of racial separation was sure to incite a violence and disorder. He also advised black leaders that continued pressure to desegregate would diminish, rather than expand, African American opportunity. “The White people of South Carolina,” declared Byrnes, “could pay for the education of their children” in a private system. Conversely, few African Americans had the financial resources to pay for private schooling. In such a situation, “Negro citizens would suffer,” alleged the governor, “because of the irresponsible action of representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.”52

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid, “Address of James F. Byrnes, Governor of South Carolina, to the South Carolina Education Association,” (March 16, 1951) 577-583.
Byrnes was aware that in order for his plan to work, he had to maintain the illusion of uncompromising white unity on how to handle the segregation issue. In fact, while most whites were firmly committed to Jim Crow, the exact degree of that commitment varied. In his quest to map out a plan for preserving the racial caste system, the governor had to gain the support of these distinct, if overlapping, white constituencies: hardcore segregationists, mainstream whites, and white business interests. The hardcore group was determined to use any and all means to fend off all civil rights progress, including the open intimidation of black activists and efforts to ostracize and pressure sympathetic whites. Mainstream whites sought to preserve segregation, but were unwilling to tolerate lawlessness, civil unrest, or the disruption of the state’s economy simply to prevent what they hoped would be a modicum of token desegregation. Most of the white business elites were in the mainstream group, but even conservative business owners and professionals who were ardent segregationists were unwilling to accept steep financial costs in their quest to preserve white privilege. With rare exceptions, such as the Warings, integrationist sentiment among white South Carolinians was almost non-existent.

In many ways, Byrnes’s most difficult task was gaining the support of the most uncompromising hardcore segregationists. Even the term “equalization” was problematic for committed white supremacists, but whites trusted the governor when he promised that the program was the only way to avoid a federal order to desegregate the schools. Fiscally conservative segregationists were also reluctant to allocate funds to black schools, but Byrnes assured the state’s white voters that, if the new schools were closed as a result of court ordered desegregation, the new buildings would not be “wasted.” The
governor promised that, should the courts order South Carolina to desegregate its public education system, the state would simply hand over its public school buildings to segregated private schools. According to Byrnes, however, such drastic action would not be necessary anyway. He assured the state’s segregationists that if the taxpayers “properly discharge our duty, we make more difficult the task of those who would have the Federal Government control our schools.” He was also careful to note that the proposed three cent tax would also afford whites the opportunities to improve their own schools.53

In order to ensure support from educators and more moderate whites, Byrnes declared his desire to provide a “full public education” to “every child in the state, white or colored.” At a meeting of the South Carolina Educational Association in March 1951, the governor promised that the main purpose of the equalization plan was to improve, not to close, South Carolina’s schools. He pointed out that South Carolina had the highest rate of rejection for intellectual ineptitude for military service in the Korean conflict. More than 60 percent of the South Carolinians called up for the draft were rejected as opposed to a rejection rate of 35 percent for the rest of the South. Byrnes blamed this failure on South Carolina’s poor education system and pointed out that on average over 80,000 of the state’s 494,000 students were absent from school on any given day. Byrnes also noted that at least 16,000 white children and more than 17,500 black children were not enrolled in school at all. His plan, Byrnes argued, would not only equalize, but also modernize the state’s failing school system.54

53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
School improvement was also the best way for the governor to reach out to business owners and the state’s chambers of commerce. Byrnes argued that the equalization plan would foster a positive business climate in South Carolina and pointed out that, in order to bring new jobs to the state, it would have to improve its dismal public school system. New Deal farm programs had decreased the emphasis on labor-intensive agriculture and modern jobs required skilled workers. When poor whites and African Americans poured into cities looking for work, they were often unqualified for the new jobs. For white economic boosters, the equalization plan promised to promote the post-World War II industrial economy without disrupting racial customs.

At first, the South Carolina General Assembly balked at raising taxes to fund the construction of black schools. However, by the end of his first legislative session, Byrnes was able to convince a handful of powerful lawmakers, including state Senator L. Marion Gressette and future Governor and United States Senator Ernest “Fritz” Hollings, that equalization was a worthy goal for the state. Education professionals and the state’s business interests overwhelmingly supported the measure while hardcore segregationists did so more reluctantly. Before formal arguments in the Briggs case could even begin, the Education Finance Commission initiated the process of “equalizing” South Carolina’s segregated schools.55

After winning an important political victory in the sales tax debate, Byrnes pressured the state assembly to follow through with other important aspects of his

equalization strategy. Since the governor had promised that the new school buildings could be privatized if necessary, Byrnes encouraged the legislature to pass a bill which would allow local school boards to sell or lease school property to private groups. If the federal government forced desegregation and the state followed through with its plan to abandon the public school system, the governor wanted to ensure that local boards could create a “private” school system using existing facilities. The legislature passed the measure and took it a step further when it passed a law to withhold state funds from any district that was ordered to desegregate by a federal court. The new laws would have made it all but impossible for local school officials to operate a desegregated public education system in South Carolina. The lack of funding would force desegregated districts to either privatize or close altogether. So that county governments would have time to set up a new private system, the South Carolina General Assembly also passed a measure that forbade the transfer of a student from one school to another without permission from the county superintendent. This law created one last bureaucratic roadblock to prevent or delay student transfers from an African American school to a white one.\footnote{Ibid.}

Not content with creating this elaborate bureaucratic and legal bulwark against school integration, the General Assembly also created a special committee to monitor legal challenges to segregated education and plan a response. The South Carolina School Committee, which was chaired by Calhoun County Senator L. Marion Gressette, included five members from the state Senate, five from the state House of Representatives, and
five members at large. It was the first legislative committee created to deal with the “desegregation issue” in any southern public school system.57

Despite Byrnes’s self-serving efforts to “equalize” the state’s dual school system, African Americans in Clarendon County were determined to press on with their challenge to segregated schools. Although intimidation had eroded membership in the NAACP and forced several individuals to remove their names from the desegregation petition, the NAACP’s legal team was able to secure the signatures of 20 adults and 46 children demanding an end to the county’s segregated school system. The case, *Briggs v. Elliott*, both frightened and infuriated whites when it finally went before a three-judge panel in May 1951. South Carolina whites were particularly upset at the presence of Waring on the panel. Though they knew that fellow jurist Judge George Bell Timmerman would rule in favor of the defense, many whites feared that Waring would convince Judge John J. Parker, who was a political moderate, to order an end to segregated schools in South Carolina.58

The plaintiffs’ attorney, Thurgood Marshall, contended that students in the county were denied their constitutional rights in the segregated school system. Since the county’s attorneys Robert McCormick Figg and S. Emory Rogers acknowledged that the physical facilities of the black schools were inadequate, the NAACP legal team concentrated on the inequity of segregation itself. Marshall introduced the testimony of a number of social scientists, who each argued that segregation established a psychological impediment to success and was therefore a violation of the rights of African American

57 Ibid.

students. Rogers and Figg insisted that *Plessy v. Ferguson* allowed for segregated schools as long as they were equal. The attorneys contended that black leaders had every right to demand equal facilities and requested that the court give the state time to improve black schools. Figg warned that a court order demanding the desegregation of southern schools would lead to extensive conflict and violence in the region. He asked the judges to grant the state “reasonable time” to implement school equalization.⁵⁹

*Briggs v. Elliott* brought widespread attention to South Carolina’s segregated schools and may have served to embolden black activists, but it was initially a victory for white segregationists. When the decision of the three judge panel was handed down in the summer of 1951, Judge Parker declared that the state must afford African American students the same educational opportunities as those afforded to whites, but he and Judge George Bell Timmerman refused to outlaw state supported segregated education. The two judges ruled that Byrnes’s equalization plan would bring the state in compliance with the “separate but equal” doctrine established in the *Plessy* case. South Carolina’s white leadership gave its overwhelming endorsement to the decision. Senator Maybank declared it an “honest, clear, straight Constitutional ruling on behalf of public education in South Carolina.” In an interview on CBS television, Maybank insisted that “the good colored people,” of his state were not interested in integration, although he refused to

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lend support to abandoning the public school system if the courts did order desegregation.60

Judge Waring, however, provided solid grounds for an appeal when he issued a strong dissenting opinion. He insisted that segregation itself was inherently unequal. He wrote, “I am of the opinion that all the legal guideposts, expert testimony, common sense and reason point unerringly to the conclusion that the system of segregation in education adopted and practiced in the state of South Carolina must go and must go now. Segregation is per se inequality.” Therefore, African Americans left the courthouse with a mandate to improve black schools and, thanks largely to Waring’s opinion, hopes for a more promising outcome if the case was appealed to the United States Supreme Court. Less than a month after the three-judge panel issued its decision, Marshall appealed the verdict to the nation’s highest court. White leaders had hoped that the panel’s decision had created a viable alternative to desegregation and would silence “bothersome” black activists, but they fully expected an appeal.61

The delay between the case and its appeal gave white leaders an opportunity to consolidate and refine Byrnes’s equalization plan. Under the direction of the governor and state legislature, local school boards began to redraw district boundaries in an effort to create another defense against desegregation. The new plan reduced the number of school districts in the state from 1,002 to 102. Small rural schools were closed and consolidated into larger, newer buildings. Moreover, the newly gerrymandered districts


were designed to allow whites to use residential segregation as a means to maintain racial separation in education. Although consolidation did have an important modernizing effect on the South Carolina school system, its implementation further solidified racial separation as the official policy of the state.62

African American leaders, however, were not willing simply to allow whites to use the time consumed with the appellate process to construct additional barriers to black access without opposition. Even in defeat the Briggs case had an immediate impact on black community efforts to improve African American schools. Civil rights leaders from all over the state demanded that the general assembly utilize the new “equalization” funds to close the educational gap between black and white children. However, for South Carolina whites school equalization was a mechanism for limiting, not encouraging, black community activism, and local whites were determined to manage carefully the impact of the program. In many districts local school boards used the new sales tax revenues to funnel money into existing, or new white schools.63

Perhaps the most dramatic example of a local school board using a disproportionate amount of the new funds to improve white schools while black schools remained under-funded occurred in Charleston. Charleston’s School Board hoped to utilize its black population to convince the Finance Commission to allocate significant funds to the city’s schools. In 1952, the city implemented a plan to divide its $2.4 million dollar allocation equally between the white and black school system even though there were more black

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students and the African American schools were in a worse state of disrepair. Statewide, less than half (40%) of the student population was black, and the state did spend almost two-thirds of the new money on African American schools, but, as the situation in Charleston demonstrated, even the disbursement of a large portion of the funds to the black schools could do little to erase the disparities in black and white education.64

Initially, black leaders in Charleston were pleased to see any improvements in the city’s African American schools. Black parents, however, soon became frustrated with the school board’s use of the new funds. Arthur Clement, the President of the Charleston NAACP and Secretary of the PDP, and Peter Poinsette, an African American member of the PTA, claimed that the city’s growing black population and the poor condition of its existing educational facilities dictated that the school board should allocate even more funds to the black community and truly “equalize” the dual system. Clement pointed out that the new budget called for building a new gym for an all-white school that already had one, and yet failed to pay for a gym for the city’s black high school, which had no gym at all. He argued that if the school board spent the entire $2.4 million allocation on its black schools “the per capita valuation of school property for the two races would be $392 for white pupils and $345” for African American students. In other words, even a complete overhaul of the city’s black schools using 100 percent of the new state funds would have failed, in Clement’s estimation, to “equalize” the “separate but equal” system. Clement promised to bring the issue to the federal courts if the school board did not carry out a legitimate equalization program. He warned Low Country whites, “You

64 Ibid.
established the separate but equal theory – it has protected you these many years – now, you are faced with the problem of paying for it.”

Clement’s succinct warning was a reminder to the all-white school board that the fight over segregated schools was far from over. Although they won a technical victory in the Briggs case, white segregationists were hardly confident that the ruling would stand on appeal. Byrnes and his supporters realized that they might have to follow through with their threats to close the public school system if they wanted to maintain segregated education. However, the governor’s administration faced one major barrier to the abandonment of the public schools. If Byrnes wanted to privatize the schools, he first had to convince South Carolinians to change the state’s constitution. Article XI, Section 5 of the South Carolina State Constitution stipulated that “The General Assembly shall provide for a liberal system of free public schools for all children between the ages of six and twenty-one years.”

A proposed amendment to alter this provision quickly passed through the South Carolina House of Representatives during the 1951 session, but the measure stalled in the state Senate. Whites supported Jim Crow, but were many apprehensive about the notion of abandoning the publicly funded education of their own children. On January 8, 1952, Byrnes addressed the General Assembly and called on state senators to “submit to the electors of the General Election in 1952 a resolution to repeal Article XI, Section 5.” According to Byrnes, the proposed amendment was the state’s only means of ensuring its ability to maintain a segregated school system. “If this provision of our Constitution is

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65 Arthur J. Clement to the Charleston School Board (January 23, 1952), Henry Hutchinson Collection, Avery Research Center, College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina.

not repealed, and if the Supreme Court’s decision is against us,” the governor declared, “no legal avenue will be left open to us in South Carolina to have separate schools for children of the white and colored races.” Rather than oppose the popular governor, the state Senate heeded Byrnes’s warning and voted to include the amendment on the state’s ballot in the 1952 general election.67

Once the measure passed, Byrnes and his supporters initiated a sophisticated publicity campaign to increase support for the constitutional amendment. Their efforts were a prime example of how political leaders worked to ensure a consensus among South Carolina whites over how best to deal with the impending crisis over segregation. The vast majority of white South Carolinians were unapologetic segregationists who were determined to protect Jim Crow. For them, the amendment became a political statement of their commitment to South Carolina’s racial caste system. Byrnes understood that as long as he kept the question simple he could mask any divisions within the state’s white communities over how far to go to protect segregation in South Carolina’s public school systems. Byrnes and his supporters portrayed the amendment vote as a “referendum” on Jim Crow schooling.68

In a statewide radio broadcast, Lieutenant Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr. called on voters to cast their ballots for the change. Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education, Marion Gressette, claimed that the measure would “protect” the state’s education system. Congressman Rivers promised voters that the amendment was the only way to prevent “the mixing of the races in our elementary and high schools” while

67 Howard G. McClain, “South Carolina’s School Amendment,” New South (February 1953) 1-5, 8.

simultaneously improving African American institutions. Governor Byrnes went so far as to proclaim, “If you vote against the amendment,” and the Supreme Court overturns the district court’s decision, “you will force the mixing of the races in the schools.” The proposed amendment served as both a means of white resistance and as a threat to black activists who persisted in challenging South Carolina’s segregated school system.69

Of course, the NAACP and most African Americans objected to the proposal, but civil rights activists were not the only ones who opposed it. Though they refused to condemn segregation per se, both the League of Women Voters and the mostly white South Carolina Educational Association publicly denounced the Byrnes plan. The League of Women Voters even purchased radio time in Columbia to discuss the issue, but no state leader would debate the merits of the amendment on the air.70

With few exceptions, South Carolina’s elected officers generally preferred not to discuss the specifics of the Byrnes amendment, and certainly only the most hardcore segregationists declared that school closure was a good idea. South Carolina’s white leadership simply called for the continuation of segregation and left the impression that voting against the amendment would hasten the erosion of white privilege. When state leaders were asked if they favored closing the schools, most of them simply responded that they hoped it would not become necessary. The failure of white voters to question this tactic was indicative of white confidence that the state could manage the desegregation threat if given the power to do by its white constituents. Most whites considered the

69 McClain, “South Carolina’s School Amendment,” 1-5, 8. News and Courier (January 8, 1952) from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.

70 Ibid.
amendment a potent resistance tactic whether or not they truly supported the idea that closing the public schools was a good idea.\textsuperscript{71}

The proposal’s strongest support came from South Carolina’s black belt, especially along the state’s coastal plains in the southern Low Country region and the northeast Pee Dee area. There was, however, mild opposition in the piedmont and upstate regions of South Carolina. For example, Pickens County Representative Earle Morris, Jr. declared, “The purported abolition of the public schools is a calculated risk that I could not conscientiously support unless I was assured that a satisfactory method of educating our children would replace the system of free public schools.” Morris worried that “the so-called ‘private schools’ would reduce education to a prerogative of a privileged few.” Likewise, Dr. E.C. McCants, the retired Superintendent of Schools in Anderson County, claimed that the amendment could destroy what he had worked his life to build.\textsuperscript{72}

Even one Low Country paper surmised that both options of either closing the school system or desegregating it would be a “great sacrifice with little return to the voters.” Opposition also came from some church leaders who worried that they would face the financial burden of operating an education system if the state abandoned its schools. The Public Affairs Committee of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) issued a statement protesting the amendment, and the Christian Action Committee (CAC), which represented ten denominations, publicly asserted its opposition in September. The CAC declared that public education was important to democracy and chastised state leaders for using the measure to “intimidate” the Supreme Court. The

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

council also accused South Carolina politicians of using education as a “political football.”

Such pockets of dissent aside, widespread popular support for the amendment was unmistakable. The constitutional change passed in November 1952 with 72 percent of the voters supporting the measure. Although the vote probably indicated some willingness to abandon public education, it is best interpreted as a referendum on segregation. Byrnes had warned voters that a ballot against the amendment was not a vote for preserving the public school system, but a vote for the desegregation of South Carolina’s schools and the political agenda of the NAACP. His ability to shape the public debate and limit the range of options was an important reminder of the confidence that whites placed in Byrnes and his ability to properly manage the segregation issue.

Beyond the utility of the amendment in the battle to preserve segregated schooling, the governor’s broader economic argument for school modernization resonated with white South Carolinians. Although the impetus for passing the three cent sales tax, the equalization plan, school consolidation, and Governor Byrnes’s other legislative initiatives came from the legal challenges to Jim Crow segregation, there is significant evidence to suggest that white South Carolinians also supported these proposals because they really did promise to improve and modernize the state’s schools systems. Legislative reformers, such as future Governors Hollings and John West, were determined to promote educational reform. At the same time that the state assembly was debating the school amendment, it proposed a “free school lunch” program, a program to

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid.
help pay for the use of school buses for sanctioned athletic events, minimum standards for public high schools, and a bill to modernize education funding. In fact, throughout 1952 the legislature instituted significant changes to the state’s public school system that brought much needed improvements to the antiquated and under-funded system. Although the discrepancy between black and white schools remained, even African American institutions were promised significant improvements under the equalization plan.75

Nonetheless, Byrnes strategy for defending South Carolina’s particular brand of Jim Crow was an important step toward organized white resistance. The drastic measures adopted by the South Carolina General Assembly and endorsed by Governor Byrnes in the early 1950s were the state’s first significant efforts to take over the day-to-day management of white supremacy in education since the state had enacted its Jim Crow laws in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, Byrnes ensured that white South Carolinians understood that any crack in the wall of separation between whites and blacks could spell disaster for the entire institution of segregation. The governor’s unequivocal language and his endorsement of a zero tolerance policy toward desegregation hardened white resolve and strengthened white unity. Still, the widespread support for educational improvements and the recognition that economic development depended on employing an educated and well-trained work force was evidence that some white South Carolinians were as interested in progress as they were in the fight to preserve segregation.

75 South Carolina House Journal (1952) 522-530. *In February of 1952 the Supreme Court was set to decide Brown v. Board of Education in the summer of 1953.
In passing the school tax and the school amendment, South Carolinians simultaneously prepared for two possible paths. The first promised moderate leadership and a commitment to improving the state’s poor public education system. The other laid the groundwork for more militant resistance. By the fall of 1952, the minds of South Carolina whites were as divided and contradictory as the system of segregation they were fighting to protect. Plans to modernize and improve the state’s public schools coincided with threats to close them, and promises to abandon, rather than desegregate, public education overlapped with assurances that such action would never become necessary. Meanwhile, contemporary brick buildings with electricity and indoor plumbing replaced one-room schoolhouses with potbelly stoves and outhouses, and, by 1956, the state had spent more than $120 million on school improvements – two-thirds of which was spent on African American schools.76

In 1952, few could predict which tactics South Carolina would adopt to combat the still rising tide of civil rights activism and the unmistakable signals of increasing federal opposition to the South’s Jim Crow laws. State leaders promised moderation and respect for the law, but adopted measures for circumventing federal orders and implicitly encouraged reprisals against civil rights activists. The most troubling, and yet predictable aspect of the white response to the Briggs case for African Americans was the fact that white Carolinians who were the most affected by the Clarendon case and other civil rights activism displayed the greatest propensity to adopt extreme measures to protect segregation. Blacks and whites who voiced opposition to such actions were publicly shunned, economically isolated, and, at times, physically threatened and attacked. White

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76 South Carolina Educational Finance Commission, *South Carolina’s Educational Revolution*. 
South Carolinians debated a wide range of appropriate and possible tactics for protecting white supremacy across the state, but to the victims of white reprisals in the black belt counties it was already apparent that, at mid-century, South Carolina had already teetered over the edge of massive resistance.
CHAPTER 3
CAMPAIGNING ON RACE: THE ELECTIONS OF 1950

Between 1950 and 1952 South Carolina whites were nearly uniform in their opposition to black civil rights. However, reactions to the increasing encroachments on white privilege were diverse and the degree to which the segregation issue would radicalize state politics was unclear. Although the race issue was seldom far from the surface of public consciousness and debate, many whites were equally concerned with improving the state’s schools, its economy, and its infrastructure. To address those concerns political leaders at the local and state level often relied on funding from the national government. In the early 1950s South Carolina was home to several large federally funded public works projects. These projects, which included the construction of the Santee-Cooper hydroelectric plant, the Charleston Air Force Base, and the Savannah River nuclear weapons plant, funneled a considerable amount of money into the impoverished state. Furthermore, they created high paying jobs and paid for much needed internal improvements. For white voters and their elected leaders, securing funding for federal projects was both a political and economic necessity. Even elected officials who vilified federal intervention in civil rights issues vigorously lobbied for national funding for improving the state’s infrastructure and its economy.

In the wake of nascent signs of federal interests in civil rights enforcement and the intensification of internal black pressure, there were some concerns about the state’s increasing dependence on federal funding, but they were minor in comparison to calls for more, not less, federal aid to South Carolina. For example, George Grice, the president
of the College of Charleston, wrote to Senator Burnet Maybank in June 1950 to ensure that the school’s plan to borrow federal funds to improve its faculty housing would not “involve the College in any way in the racial problem.” Grice, who was a committed segregationist, worried that accepting the much needed funds would place the school under federal regulatory control. Such control, he surmised, could result in a desegregation order. Despite these apprehensions, Grice and the college continued to seek federal monies whenever possible.  

For many whites, even Grice’s mild worries were unwarranted. In spite of the post-World War II recession, the state’s economic outlook and the standard of living enjoyed by its citizens had vastly improved since the depths of the Great Depression. Most South Carolinians felt that these improvements were a direct result of federal investments during the New Deal and World War II. The Second World War had saved the Charleston Navy Base and Naval Shipyard, the Korean conflict had rescued Fort Jackson from threatened closure, and the Cold War had helped pump money into the state’s various other defense facilities. The Charleston Naval Shipyard alone employed between 10,000-15,000 workers during the late 1940s and early 1950s, and navy yard employees earned on average nearly twice as much as other area workers.

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1 George Grice to Burnet R. Maybank (June 17, 1950), Burnet Maybank to George Grice (July 17, 1950), College of Charleston Archives, Special Collections.

In addition to military spending, New Deal agriculture reforms contributed farm subsidies, low interest loans to buy agricultural equipment, and increased funding to agricultural colleges like Clemson University in the South Carolina upstate. Furthermore, Federal Housing Authority funds helped to alleviate South Carolina’s housing shortage and the rural electrification project funded the expansion of electric lines across the bucolic state. Indeed, even though the state had roundly rejected Roosevelt’s successor in 1948, New Deal programs remained popular as South Carolina entered the 1950s.3

African Americans in South Carolina, who had also been stalwart supporters of the New Deal, were also generally optimistic that the 1950s would usher in an age of prosperity. However, unlike their white neighbors, they hoped that new economic and educational opportunities would go hand in hand with the expansion of their civil and political rights. African Americans throughout the South yearned for rapid social change and an official endorsement of black rights from regional and national leaders. For the state’s African American population, progress meant more than a bigger paycheck and rural electrification.

Black South Carolinians had reason to believe that substantial change was on its way. By the dawn of the new decade the South Carolina branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had challenged educational inequality in the state, President Harry S. Truman had ordered the desegregation of the military and promised to support civil rights in the waning years of

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his administration, and northern Democrats were advocating anti-poll tax legislation, anti-lynching bills, and support for African American voting rights. These national trends provided a crucial backdrop for local initiatives in South Carolina where, in 1950 alone, Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) leader and Charleston NAACP President Arthur Clement challenged white supremacist Congressman L. Mendel Rivers in South Carolina’s First Congressional District’s Democratic primary, blacks in Clarendon County allied with NAACP Legal Defense Fund to initiate *Briggs v. Elliott*, and civil rights leaders attempted to use black ballots to influence state elections in a meaningful way for the first time since Reconstruction.

It was within this context of cautious, if differently configured hopes for the future of the state that white and black South Carolinians confronted the civil rights issue. Civil rights had dominated state politics in 1948 and the expansion of black activism since President Truman’s re-election heightened anxiety among white segregationists. Support for segregation remained a litmus test for white office seekers in South Carolina, but it was not the only issue that concerned white voters. Politicians also had to preach economic progress and support for education while simultaneously cautioning against rapid social change. Elected officials faced enormous, often contradicting, pressures to preserve white supremacy without jeopardizing white economic prosperity or surrendering local autonomy in exchange for federal funding. This chapter explains the nature of those pressures and the numerous responses to them by black and white South Carolinians during the various elections of 1950.

The economic concerns of Charleston exemplified the controversy over federal funds in South Carolina. Charleston was the largest city in South Carolina’s Low
Country region and home to the state’s most conservative daily newspaper, the *News and Courier*. In the post-World War II era the city was also a hotbed of white resistance to NAACP and PDP activism. However, Charleston was also an important bastion of the Cold War military industries and its civic leaders demanded that its congressional representatives direct federal funds to the region even if, as conservatives like George Grice feared, such money brought with it the specter of possible federal intervention in racial arrangements.

After suffering through numerous post-World War II cutbacks, the military initiated a building boom in the region beginning in the early 1950s. By the mid-1960s, more defense dollars were spent in the Charleston area than anywhere else in the nation except Norfolk, San Antonio, and San Diego, and no region saw more internal improvements funded by the United States military than the South Carolina Low Country. Moreover, federal contributions to dredging and maintaining the harbor contributed to improvements in commercial shipping. These improvements created scores of high paying jobs and provided a substantial amount of political capital for elected officials. Most of these projects were navigated through congress by Representative Rivers, who was a powerful member of the Armed Services Committee. Throughout his nearly 30 years in Congress, Rivers was notorious for steering federal defense money to his home district and lauded for his ability to increase defense spending throughout his home state.⁴

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Rivers’s influence on the growth of military industries in South Carolina was ubiquitous, but other city leaders were also important in recruiting federal projects to the previously impoverished area. Although Charleston area boosters promoted the city with the zeal of many “New South” advocates, city leaders were also happy to sell the historic district’s genteel charm. In 1949, the Carolina Art Association published a book praising Charleston for its ability to be both a prime tourist destination and a modern industrial city. The book, entitled *Charleston Grows*, pointed out that the historic peninsula was a “city with a heritage,” but it was not “an anachronistic” place “sleeping through the present.” According to the various contributors to the book it was not “a reconstruction of the eighteenth century, preserved as a museum piece.”

*Charleston Grows* portrayed the city as divided into two distinct districts. Peninsular Charleston was the epitome of southern charm and gentility and the area northwest of US 17 and southeast of Berkeley County was a booming industrial marvel. In the book, prominent Charleston author Herbert Ravenel Sass claimed, “The old historic Charleston and the new industrial Charleston are geographically separate and distinct, so that industrial development here can be wholly helpful with none of the disastrous cultural sacrifices which progress . . . often involves.” Sass and other Charleston area boosters recognized that economic advancement might blur the lines of racial and ethnic separation, but hoped that the city could find a way to foster development without risking the loss of white supremacy. Sass concluded that the “new

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Charleston” could find “inspiration and courage” in the “strong and masculine old Charleston.”

The convoluted mixture of historic memory and economic boosterism in *Charleston Grows* represented the desire of many white South Carolinians to promote economic modernization without upsetting the racial status quo. This bifurcated mindset was evident throughout South Carolina, but it was especially influential in the Low Country region in the southeast corner of the state where Charleston was located. Nearly the entire region was part of the First Congressional District and every county in it was part of the black belt. In the early spring of 1950, Low Country whites began pressuring the South Carolina Democratic Party to take immediate action to thwart various expressions of civil rights reform and activism. The Charleston County Democratic Convention passed a resolution commending the Palmetto State’s opposition to “the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] law, the anti-lynching law, the anti-poll tax law, the anti-segregation laws, commonly known as the so-called Civil Rights program.” The group also instructed its delegates to the State Democratic Convention of 1950 to “oppose any effort to have the Democratic Party of South Carolina sacrifice or compromise its traditional principles or reverse and repudiate the State Party’s opposition to the so-called Civil Rights program and those who advocate such programs.”

Nonetheless, black activists pressed on with their calls for an end to South Carolina’s restrictive election process. And, when Arthur Clement challenged Rivers in the Democratic Primary of 1950, he became both a symbol of the increasing intensity of

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6 Ibid.
7 “Resolution for the County Convention” (c. 1950), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
black political activism and a reminder of the deeply entrenched discrimination in the state’s election system. His challenge is especially noteworthy because, other than Strom Thurmond, no politician in South Carolina embodied the Dixiecrat movement more than Rivers. Indeed, Rivers and Representative John L. McMillan of Florence were the only members of the South Carolina congressional delegation to campaign openly for the Thurmond-Wright ticket in 1948.8

Rivers had built his reputation as an ardent segregationist with vicious political attacks on the Truman Administration. He called the president a “dead chicken” who did not have “sense enough” to lead the nation. In October 1948, Rivers went so far as to issue a public statement requesting that the state Democratic Party remove his name from the Truman ticket. The move was unnecessary because in South Carolina, the “Democratic” ticket was headlined by Thurmond and not Truman, but the congressman’s rhetoric helped solidify support from angry whites. “I wouldn’t be true to my convictions,” he explained, “if I ran also on the Truman ticket. I want it known that I’m supporting the States’ Rights Democrats and not the Truman Democrats.” Rivers followed the Dixiecrat Party line arguing that the States’ Rights primary was the “regular Democratic primary of South Carolina.” He declared, “I don’t want to sail under false colors or to mislead you or anyone else, and certainly it is not my desire to give Truman any intentional or inadvertent help or assistance.” Rivers called on every Southerner to “stand up and be counted,” and warned, “You’re on one side or the other, not both.”9

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
Like Rivers, Clement was a political veteran. He was the Executive Secretary of the PDP and had campaigned for Henry Wallace during the presidential election of 1948. In a letter to the Charleston *News and Courier* that year, Clement wrote:

> The Progressive Democrats do not want ‘to get into the Party of the White folks.’ We want to fully participate like any other citizen in ‘the only material and realistic election machinery’ in this State - - - The Democratic Party and its Primaries. The present government of South Carolina is not good enough for the Progressive Democrats. We desire no part of it. It is putrid. Its odor stenches the clear clean air of South Carolina.\(^{10}\)

In addition to their obvious differences regarding racial politics, a host of other issues separated Rivers and Clement. The *South Carolina Democratic Digest*, which was an official publication of the national Democratic Party in South Carolina, gave brief biographies of all of the candidates. It described Clement as a “statewide leader of Negro groups” and as a “liberal” who was “pro-labor” and “pro-National Democrat.” The paper claimed that Rivers was an “arch-foe of Truman and Civil Rights” who was “strongly conservative.”\(^{11}\)

During the election Rivers promised voters that he would “continue our fight in Washington to uphold our traditions, our customs, and our rights to run our own business in South Carolina against outside interference.” In a half-page political advertisement in the *News and Courier*, he pledged not to sell the southern “birthright for a mess of political patronage.” The congressman also claimed to be “one of the foremost defenders of states’ rights and local self-government.” Rivers, however, refused to discuss Clement directly. Instead, he attempted to remain aloof. The congressman was contemptuous of

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\(^{10}\) Arthur J. Clement to “To the Editor of the Charleston News & Courier,” (June 1, 1948), Arthur J. Clement Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia (Hereafter cited as Clement Papers, SCL).

\(^{11}\) “South Carolina Democratic Digest” (Columbia: May 1950), Clement Papers, SCL.
black forays into politics and, rather than campaign directly against Clement, Rivers utilized the publicity surrounding the race issue to enhance his reputation as defender of white privilege. He declared, “I am not taking any notice of the candidacy of one A.J. Clement, Jr. for Congress from the First Congressional District,” as he did not wish to “lend dignity to [Clement’s] candidacy.” The congressman dismissed Clement as an unsuitable opponent who was “an officer in the organization created by Henry Wallace, known as the ‘Americans for Democratic Action,’ that opposed “every concept and political philosophy of which the South Carolina Democratic Party is made and of which it is composed.”

In addition to provoking declarations of contempt from Rivers, Clement’s candidacy helped to exacerbate white fears and reinforced the notion that the state’s Jim Crow voting restrictions were under siege. That anxiety was a potent tool for mobilizing white political power. State Representative Joseph Wise of Charleston published a campaign leaflet that warned against the “menace” of “bloc voting.” The advertisement quoted former North Carolina Governor Charles B. Aycock who had said in 1898: “When we came to power, we desired merely the security of life, liberty and prosperity. We had seen all these menaced by 120,000 Negro votes cast as the vote of one man.” Wise’s campaign literature pointed out that several North Carolina cities had been affected by “bloc voting” by blacks in the state’s primary. Furthermore, he contended, “These same tactics are BEING ATTEMPTED in Charleston County, South Carolina.”

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12 Telegram from L. Mendel Rivers to Calvit N. Clarke, Chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee, Monck’s Corner, South Carolina (July 9, 1950), Rivers Papers, SCHS. News and Courier (July 9, 1950) 7A. Rough Draft of Letter from L. Mendel Rivers to “Dear Mr. Chairman” (June 21, 1950) Rivers Papers, SCHS.
He also cautioned that white “must UNITE TOGETHER in order to preserve our TRUE SOUTHERN DEMOCRACY.”

Like Wise, Rivers understood that white political unity was very important to his re-election, but Rivers seemed more concerned about setting the stage for future elections. Like other white leaders in the South, Rivers was tasked with rallying whites to his cause without encouraging politically ambitious moderates to recognize the prospective power of a biracial coalition. While he feigned a lack of interest in the election and assured voters of his certain victory, Rivers also reminded voters that the primary was “very important,” and he urged “every eligible white person” to register to vote by June 10, 1950 so that “all qualified white persons” could show up at the polls. According to the congressman, “It is essential that we register and vote to maintain and preserve good government and protect our interest against the forces that are working day and night to change our way of life and deprive us of the freedom we cherish.”

Rivers’s actions in the campaign revealed a tension that permeated white political ranks across South Carolina in the 1950s. Jim Crow restrictions were created to limit the potential power of black ballots and to prevent the formation of a biracial political alliance that could threatened the elite white power structure. The erosion of those controls on African American voting rights threatened to create new political coalitions and weaken white unity on the issue of segregation. During the election Rivers worried privately that a high black turnout might encourage moderate whites to seek office in future elections. He understood, as did most white leaders, that such a combination of

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13 “Bloc Voting By Any Group is a Menace to Democracy” (n.d.), Clement Papers, SCL.

14 L. Mendel Rivers to Y.C. Weathersbee et al. (May 25, 1950), L. Mendel Rivers to James Henry Clark et al. (May 25, 1950), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
white and black votes could pose a serious challenge to more conservative candidates.

Rivers proclaimed:

I believe that the white people in Charleston are alert to the potentialities of the negro (sic). The election this year will demonstrate one thing – that we have in our midst people of the Waring ilk who are promoting the negro (sic) and in the future we will have white men running with their blessings. Then they can really wield the balance of power.15

Clement recognized the same potential and spent most his campaign attempting to energize black voters and, as Rivers feared, reach out to more moderate whites. He realized that in 1950 it was impossible for a black candidate to win an election in South Carolina, even in the First District where blacks comprised a majority of the population. According to the 1940 census there were approximately 170,000 blacks in the district compared to just over 120,000 whites. However, despite the legal advances for black political rights in the previous decade, the majority of the district’s African Americans were still not registered for the elections of 1950 – reflecting a recurring void between increasingly progressive laws and judicial rulings regarding race and consistently conservative practices at the local level.16

Journalist and publisher John McCray also understood the potential effect of a large black voter turnout. He urged African Americans to register before the June 10 deadline and called for “the chairman and executive committee of each precinct, club and organization working under the Progressive Democrats banner to begin at once a daily

15 L. Mendel Rivers to Ashley Halsey (June 3, 1950), Rivers Papers, SCHS.

campaign of registration which must not be slowed up until the last minute is used.”
McCray instructed the Executive Committee of the Progressive Democratic Party to
arrange transportation for citizens who wished to register. “Mendel Rivers must not go
back to Congress” he proclaimed, “We can keep him out, but we must do it by registering
now and following through with the voting until July 11th.”\textsuperscript{17}

Since many whites and blacks were apprehensive of being associated with radical
leftist politics, Clement attempted to counter the accusation that “civil rights” was
euphemism for communism. Instead, he claimed that black progress was an important
issue for all South Carolinians. “When we hear the term ‘civil rights’ we immediately
see ‘color,’” observed Clement, but he contended, “Civil Rights is the essence of our
American Way. It is our chief weapon against all foreign ‘isms.’ In South Carolina, civil
rights have been a ‘dead truth,’ an untouchable. We wish to bring it onto the open for its
avoidance has affected all our people – not just a segment.” “We have frittered away our
glorious heritage,” said Clement, “and the possibilities wrapped up in the American
Dream by allowing our attitudes and ambitions to become wrapped by racism.”\textsuperscript{18}

Despite these efforts, Rivers easily defeated Clement in the primary election. The
incumbent garnered over 42,000 votes compared to Clement’s 7,000. Most of Clement’s
support came from the African American communities in Charleston and Beaufort
Counties. The Charleston \textit{Evening Post} smugly declared, “We believe he [Rivers] would
have won the election even if there had been any serious opposition to him.”\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{17} John H. McCray to “Fellow Citizen” (May 26, 1950), Clement Papers, SCL.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{News and Courier} (May 17, 1950) from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.

\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Evening Post} (July 12, 1950), \textit{Lighthouse and Informer} (July 15, 1950) from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.
\textit{Evening Post} (July 17, 1950) 4.
The African American communities in South Carolina and across the South were divided over how to react to Clement’s showing. In an editorial, the *Atlanta Daily World* claimed to have “nothing but the highest esteem and commendation for South Carolina’s young A.J. Clement, Jr.” The paper noted that Clement had received enough financial support to pay for campaign expenses and that he had made a remarkably good showing despite the overwhelming challenge of confronting the white political hierarchy. The editorial stated:

Although he received only 7,299 votes against his opponent’s 43,489, we do not think that was a poor showing for a candidate entering a campaign with so many grave and insuperable obstacles. Not only was the total atmosphere of the campaign rabidly anti-Negro but the atmosphere and tempo of the state was hostile. Dixiecrats and the Dixiecrat spirit was the central note, the like of which only Georgia could equal or surpass. Accordingly, his race, while badly beaten, served to educate white voters and to give Negroes a keener interest and appreciation for the right of the franchise.²⁰

Closer to home, however, some members of the black community were outraged by the limited support that Clement had received from African American voters. An editorial in the *Lighthouse and Informer* complained that blacks in Charleston could have done more to promote Clement’s candidacy and hinted at alleged improprieties in the election process. “In the initial probing of the matter,” the paper claimed, “it seems that several [blacks] were urged to vote against” Clement and “for his Dixiecrat opponent.” McCray and Clement each condemned conservative blacks who supported Rivers in order to gain political patronage. The *Lighthouse and Informer* editorial argued that the loss was a serious blow to the political rights of African Americans. The article stated,

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²⁰“It Was Worth the Try,” *Atlanta Daily World* (July 16, 1950), from the Clement Papers, SCL.
“Never again soon will we have the golden opportunity we had in the first district.” In a letter to Clement, McCray declared the black participation in the election “disgraceful.”

Although McCray, Clement, and other black leaders had not expected a victory for the African American candidate, the miniscule voter turnout in the black communities of the First District was a serious blow. Not only was it evidence that white state leaders had minimized the effectiveness of court orders to end the lily white primary, but the low turnout also meant that it would be even harder to convince white candidates that a moderate biracial coalition could unseat conservative Democrats, such as Rivers. White solidarity coupled with the absence of federal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws and rulings meant that black voters could be safely ignored in black belt elections for the foreseeable future.

The election also demonstrated the degree to which white segregationists still controlled the political process. White leaders had made Clement’s candidacy as difficult as possible. Clement’s campaign received no assistance from the Democratic Party of South Carolina, and party officials actively sought to limit his involvement in official events. For example, The County Chairman of the Democratic Party of Hampton County refused to allow Clement to speak at a party rally. When the challenger complained to state party officials, William P. Baskin, the State Chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party, responded that local officials were not required to invite any candidate to speak. Baskin claimed that he had no authority to “invite” a candidate to a county meeting.

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22 William P. Baskin to Arthur J. Clement (June 1, 1950), Clement Papers, SCL.
White newspapers encouraged the notion that Clement was a fringe candidate with little or no support from whites or blacks. For example, Clement was vilified by the Charleston *News and Courier*. On two occasions, the conservative newspaper attacked Clement for not properly answering the “race question.” The Charleston paper editorially condemned him for failing to oppose the “compelled mixture of the white and colored races in industries (the FEPC)” and for his support of “mixed race schools and colleges.” It also noted that Clement was not “in favor of separation of the races in railroad cars, public buses, hotels and restaurants, or in favor of residential separation of races as is now customary in cotton mill villages and other localities.” In summation, the editorial declared that Clement was undesirable because he did “not commit himself to opposing any kind of racial mingling or as favoring any kind of racial separation.” The *News and Courier* insisted that its opposition to Clement was not based on the candidate’s race, but on his political beliefs. In fact, an editorial declared that African Americans should enjoy the same political rights as whites, as long as any prospective black candidate favored segregation. Of course, the newspaper’s editorial staff was well aware that such a caveat would eliminate any serious black candidate.23

After the election, segregationists were convinced that their efforts had paid off. Whites were jubilant at the lack of black political participation in the primary, and Rivers’s easy victory seemed to alleviate paranoid fears of an African American takeover of the Democratic Party. The *Hampton Democrat* declared: “Apparently the fear that many South Carolinians had that the Negroes would flock to the polls and vote into office candidates unpalatable to the majority of white voters was without justification.”

23 *News and Courier* (July 8, 1950) 4A.
newspaper argued that voter turnout among African Americans was so low in the state that “there is no real reason to believe Negroes would vote in a bloc.” For many whites, Rivers’ triumph was an indication that they had stemmed the rising tide of black activism that had characterized the previous year. It was also additional fodder for whites to utilize to argue that most South Carolina blacks were content with white political leadership.24

Nonetheless, any display of black political activism, no matter how circumscribed, elicited a palpable degree of fear from South Carolina’s white communities. For some politicians, the time seemed ripe to take advantage of these apprehensions in a statewide election. Governor J. Strom Thurmond, who had won over 70 percent of the state’s popular vote in the presidential election of 1948, hoped that white distrust of President Harry Truman and the national Democratic Party would lead him to victory over the state’s most prominent Truman supporter, United States Senator Olin D. Johnston. Against the backdrop of the Rivers-Clement race, NAACP legal challenges to white supremacy, and the desegregation of the military, Thurmond initiated his first attempt to reach the United States Senate.

By the time the former Dixiecrat announced his candidacy, many of the state’s leading political observers had already envisaged a victory for Thurmond. The Charleston News and Courier forecast an “overwhelming” triumph for the governor. Conservative newspaperman William D. Workman predicted Thurmond would garner almost 60 percent of the popular vote, and the Sumter Daily Item declared that Johnston’s support for the president would translate into a sure victory for Thurmond. In fact, few

24 Hampton Democrat (July 16, 1950), from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.
political observers felt that Johnston could defeat the popular governor. Several political prognosticators reasoned that the recent election losses of other southern Truman supporters and racial moderates like Claude Pepper of Florida and Frank Porter Graham of North Carolina were evidence of Johnston’s vulnerability on the race issue.25

In each of these cases, political pundits calculated that a conservative backlash against the national Democratic Party would provide an election-day win for Thurmond. However, these same analysts underestimated Johnston’s own reputation as an ardent white supremacist at a time when the race issue was especially vexing for many voters. For example, when the incumbent senator received the endorsement of his hometown newspaper, the Anderson Independent, it defended his record on matters of race and attempted to draw a contrast between Johnston and several other southern senators who faced difficult elections in 1950. The Anderson newspaper editorialized that Johnston had little in common with the defeated “liberal” senators from North Carolina and Florida. Instead, the paper asserted that Johnston was a member of a powerful block of southern senators who helped defeat civil rights initiatives, such as the permanent FEPC. The newspaper concluded, “Both Pepper and Graham gave support and sympathy to FEPC legislation. Johnston never has and never will.” Furthermore, the Anderson daily claimed that the Senator had more in common with arch-segregationists Lister Hill of Alabama, Walter George of Georgia, and Clyde Hoey of North Carolina.26


26 Anderson Independent (July 9, 1950) 4. The State (July 1, 1950) 3. Several Thurmond campaign advertisements and clippings that deal with this strategy are located in the 1950 Democratic Primary campaign files of the Olin D. Johnston Papers, Modern Political Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina [Hereafter cited as Johnston Papers, MPC].
Johnston adopted much the same tactic as his hometown newspaper. He tried to reach out to popular southern conservatives and distanced himself from the moderate wing of the national Democratic Party. The senator even attempted to gain an endorsement from Georgia Senator Richard Russell, who was well respected amongst segregationists for his efforts to preserve Jim Crow. Russell praised Johnston and fellow South Carolina Senator Burnet R. Maybank, but did not wish to “interject” himself “into the South Carolina primary.” Despite Russell’s desire for neutrality, Johnston’s campaign staff reprinted Russell’s praise of the incumbent in newspaper advertisements.²⁷

Fortunately for Johnston, conservative newspaper editors and black belt segregationists did not constitute the majority of white voters. Convincing white Johnston supporters to abandon the senator was a difficult sell. He was a former mill worker who had a strong following in the upstate region and appealed to white voters on both racial and economic grounds. Johnston considered himself the political champion of the state’s white textile workers, and, like many of his constituents, he was a vocal supporter of Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal and white workers’ rights. He was the only southern senator to vote for the repeal of the Taft-Hartley law, which limited the rights of workers to form unions and to strike. He had also led the South’s efforts to limit the effects of the Smith v. Allwright decision. As governor (1943-1945) Johnston was the architect of the “South Carolina Plan,” whereby the state legislature removed any

reference to political parties from state law, and declared the Democratic Party a “private club” that was not subject to the court decision. Almost overnight, the state legislature repealed 150 state statutes governing primary elections. Although this process was later declared unconstitutional in *Elmore v. Rice*, it nonetheless boosted Johnston a reputation as an uncompromising segregationist.28

Thurmond’s strategy was more one-dimensional. He hoped to recreate the Dixiecrat alliance that had helped him win the state in 1948. Thurmond felt that white voters would flock to his campaign and cast their ballots based on his stalwart defense of segregation two years earlier. The governor realized that, due to his stint as a Dixiecrat in 1948, he had no hope of winning the black vote. Even though he and every other white politician in South Carolina were aware of the increase in black voting rights, Thurmond felt that he could attract enough alienated white voters to offset the modest increase in black participation. He anticipated that alienating blacks would make him a more attractive candidate to the segregationist electorate, but also understood that his victory depended on his ability to persuade South Carolina whites that the re-election of Johnston actually threatened the institution of segregation.

Many political observers knew that the governor’s strategy was a risky one. Former South Carolina State Senator Paul Quattlebaum cautioned the governor not to miscalculate the effects of the African American vote in the primary, and United States Congressman L. Mendel Rivers contended that state NAACP leader James Hinton was openly campaigning against Thurmond. Quattlebaum expressed a common concern and

alleged that blacks were registering to vote at a rate of “twenty to one” when compared to new white voters. Moreover, he repeated the common speculation that African American voters would cast their ballots as a “herd.”

When the official campaign tour commenced in Lexington County on May 23, 1950, neither Thurmond nor Johnston wasted any time with polite debate. Each candidate accused the other of jeopardizing the foundation of segregation with his political actions in 1948. Johnston repeatedly claimed that the only way to preserve the separation of the races was for southern politicians to maintain seniority within the national Democratic Party. Thurmond accused Johnston of collaborating with the very forces that sought to dismantle Jim Crow. Thurmond reminded voters that “I stuck my neck out for you two years ago.” Referring to the Dixiecrat revolt, he declared, “Don’t forget that I fought the fight for states rights while my opponent ran out on the Democrats of South Carolina.” Since the South Carolina Democratic Party had endorsed Thurmond in the presidential election of 1948, the governor even claimed that Johnston had violated his loyalty oath to the state party by supporting Truman.

Thurmond’s campaign rested largely on his assertion that Johnston was trying to pose as a loyal segregationist at home, but was really a committed “Trumanite.” “My opponent,” declared Thurmond, “may think he can play around in Washington with the Truman—C.I.O. crowd and then come back down here and pose as a great States’ Rights Democrat, but he is not going to get by with it.” He grouped Johnston with “those who

29 Paul Quattlebaum to J. Strom Thurmond (April 22, 1950), Paul Quattlebaum Papers, Special Collections, Strom Thurmond Institute, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina [Hereafter cited as Quattlebaum Papers, Thurmond Institute]. Rivers to Thurmond (n.d.), Rivers Papers, SCHS.

stabbed the Democratic Party of South Carolina in the back and repudiated its principles.

. .” He warned that Johnston “should not now try to get back in the party and seek favors from party membership,” and suggested that the incumbent Senator “sail under [his] true colors and offer [himself] openly on the Truman Party ticket.” Moreover, Thurmond claimed that United States Attorney General J. Howard McGrath was the driving force behind Truman’s civil rights initiatives and that Johnston’s support for him was a direct threat to the legal structure of segregation. In one campaign advertisement, Thurmond labeled a photograph of Johnston and McGrath together with the caption: “Olin Johnston Drinks Toast to the man Harry Truman Appointed to End Segregation in the South.”

Thurmond alleged that no southerner could work within Truman’s Democratic Party to protect segregation. Instead, he insisted that southern leaders should refuse to compromise with party members who advocated civil rights for African Americans.31

By contrast, Johnston urged South Carolina voters to look toward the Democratic Party to defend segregation. He claimed that southerners could only counteract the burgeoning support for black voting and civil rights within the national party. The senator told voters that he had “been fighting for states rights for thirty years.” He cautioned South Carolinians not to isolate themselves from the rest of the nation, and declared that the fight to save segregation should remain “within the party.” Johnston preached a unified front in the battle to preserve segregated society. “As long as we are split,” he said, “we can’t hope to accomplish much.”32


Unfortunately for Johnston, South Carolina’s black belt newspaper editors tended
to agree with Thurmond. The *Sumter Daily Item* went so far as to announce that a
Thurmond victory would be a defeat for Truman and his supporters. The editorial
labeled Johnston “Truman’s man,” and decided that he was “tainted with Trumanism.”
The Charleston *News and Courier* joked that, if Johnston were to defeat Thurmond in the
primary, the state should hold a run-off election between the “Trumanite” Johnston and
the anti-Truman Johnston. When Johnston labeled President Truman a “political mishap”
and a “blabbermouth,” the Charleston paper asked whether the Senator referred to
Truman as “Mr. President” or “Mr. Blabbermouth” while in Washington D.C.\(^\text{33}\)

The governor tapped further into white anxiety by accusing Johnston of secretly
working with black leaders and pandering to black crowds. At one debate, Thurmond
declared, “I appreciate the fact that the applause for me came from the white people of
Berkeley county,” and noted that Johnston only received cheers from the African
American attendees. Thurmond was clearly attempting to influence the media’s
perception of the event. Journalist William Workman, whose articles appeared in the
*News and Courier* and *The State* newspapers, frequently reported on the racial makeup of
the campaign audiences. He also took detailed notes regarding which candidate curried
the most favor from white audiences and which participant received the most applause
from African Americans. Workman, who had a clear political agenda, privately warned

Thurmond that the National Democratic Party and the NAACP planned to spend $250,000 to organize black voters and rally support for Johnston.³⁴

Despite the near constant attacks from Thurmond’s campaign, Johnston did not shy away from his allegiance to the national Democratic Party in 1948 or from his record on the race issue. The incumbent senator argued that it was he, and not Thurmond, who had struggled to defend white privilege. For instance, Johnston attacked the former Dixiecrat for naming Dr. T.C. McFall, an African American, to a South Carolina medical advisory board in 1949. The board, which was appointed by the governor, was charged with working with the state board of health to evaluate hospital construction. State law stipulated that the members of the council were chosen on the recommendation of the South Carolina Medical Association. The Association had recommended McFall so that state policy makers could better understand the health needs of South Carolina’s black population. Johnston characterized Thurmond’s actions as an attempt “to break down segregation,” and accused Thurmond of pandering for black votes with the McFall appointment. According to Johnston, Thurmond’s appointment of the African American doctor was directly related to the “end” of the white primary with the Smith v. Allwright decision.³⁵

In the face of Johnston’s audacious attack on his segregationist credentials, Thurmond claimed that state law had required him to appoint McFall and that he took no pleasure in the selection. He vigorously denied Johnston’s accusation of pandering to

³⁴ *The State* (July 7, 1950) 1. Notes on the 1950 Democratic Primary and Untitled manuscript dated February 6, 1950 from the Workman Papers, MPC.

black voters. Thurmond was supported by the state medical association, and a number of South Carolina newspapers. The Charleston *News and Courier* proclaimed that the McFall nomination contributed to the “health of all the people, white and colored.”\textsuperscript{36}

Thurmond sought to distract attention from the McFall nomination issue by implicating Johnston in a race scandal of his own. While serving as governor, Johnston had approved the parole of Dave Dunham. Upon his release, Dunham, who was an African American, murdered a white 22-year-old Chester County veteran. Thurmond blamed Johnston for the crime and declared that Johnston’s “pardon racket” was to blame for the murder. Thurmond charged that during Johnston’s gubernatorial term, “an unbridled and unbelievable pardon and parole spree” occurred. He claimed that Johnston was responsible for the release of over 3,000 convicts from South Carolina prisons. According to Thurmond, during Johnston’s administration “it was easier to get out of the penitentiary than it was to get in.”\textsuperscript{37}

In spite of Thurmond’s defense that he was simply following state law and his condemnation of the Senator’s gubernatorial record, Johnston refused to let the former Dixiecrat off the hook. Johnston presented evidence that, as governor, he had only pardoned or paroled 671 people. Furthermore, he pointed out that he had only released half as many prisoners as his predecessor, Ibra C. Blackwood. He also noted that voters should hold Thurmond responsible for the McFall nomination. He reminded his constituents that Thurmond had signed the law in the first place. “I would have suffered my right arm to be severed,” claimed Johnston, “before I would have signed any


commission” for McFall. The Senator went so far as to place a full-page advertisement in The State proclaiming:

Thurmond Appoints Negro! Wade Hampton’s Era of Segregation Ends in South Carolina as Thurmond replaces white Doctor with Charleston Negro in Bold bid to Capture Negro Vote of State! First Negro Appointed to State Position Since Days of Carpetbaggers and Scalawags!

On another occasion, Johnston declared, “I would never have appointed the nigger physician . . . to displace your beloved white physician . . .” When a group of African Americans in the audience took offense at Johnston’s remarks, Johnston declared, “make those niggers keep quiet.” When the Thurmond campaign declared Johnston a closet integrationist, he proclaimed that his opponents were “low down contemptible liar[s].”

In addition to instigating the uproar over the McFall affair, Johnston also chastised Thurmond for “inviting” the black governor of the Virgin Islands, William H. Hastie, to visit South Carolina as the governor’s guest. Following the national governor’s conference in 1947, Thurmond’s office sent invitations to visit South Carolina as the official guests of the governor to each state executive who could not attend the conference. Since Hastie did not attend, he received the invitation. Apparently, Thurmond’s secretary was unaware that Hastie was black. Unfortunately for Thurmond, Hastie was also a Truman appointee who had participated in the Smith v. Allwright case.

Beyond his attacks on Thurmond’s commitment to racial integrity, Johnston also re-enforced his own reputation as a committed segregationist with a well-timed attack on

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In the months leading up to the campaign, Johnston was a leading spokesman against the establishment of a permanent FEPC. He and 21 other southern senators used the filibuster to prevent a vote on the bill. Johnston also utilized his position as the chairman of the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service to slow down congressional committee work until the bill was ultimately defeated. Each of the 12 attempts to end the impasse and create a permanent FEPC failed. For Johnston, the defeat of the FEPC legislation was one of his most important achievements. Both the Anderson Independent and The State newspaper in Columbia congratulated the senator for his stand against the FEPC, and he did not hesitate to remind voters of his “victory” over the legislation. “I have fought for you in the United States Senate,” Johnston declared, “and I mean to continue.” Predictably, Thurmond was less impressed with his opponent’s efforts to block permanent FEPC legislation, proclaiming, “I fail to see how he can claim any support from the people of South Carolina for helping to kill the pet measure of the man he helped elect on a platform calling for civil rights programs.”

By the time the votes were tabulated in the primary, Johnston had defeated Thurmond by over 27,000 votes. The upcountry Democrat carried 186,180 votes to Thurmond’s 158,904. Thurmond’s showing paled in comparison to his performance in the 1948 presidential campaign when he carried every South Carolina county except Anderson and Spartanburg, which were dominated by the textile industry and populated by staunch New Dealers.


Thurmond’s 1950 campaign failed on three levels. First, the governor underestimated Johnston’s reputation as a defender of Jim Crow and overestimated the potency of his own credentials as a white supremacist. Second, he gambled that the recent challenges to the racial status quo would alienate a large number of white Democratic loyalists, but failed to attract enough white voters to offset the effects of a growing African American electorate, which voted largely for Johnston. Third, Thurmond criticized federal funding of state sponsored projects in a state that was economically dependent on such funds. Each of these tactical errors merits closer attention and each reveals important information about the tone and substance of racial politics in South Carolina in the years before the Brown decision.

Although Thurmond is routinely rendered in the historiography of massive resistance as a peerless segregationist, in fact, his reputation for supporting white supremacy was no stronger than Johnston’s in 1950. Indeed, prior to his stint as a Dixiecrat, Thurmond was widely regarded a progressive governor. It was no surprise, then, that Johnston supporters refused to accept the governor’s claim that a vote for the incumbent senator would undermine the racial status quo.42

Ironically, Thurmond’s demagoguery was more successful in driving away African American voters than in uniting whites. Black leaders had few real choices. In a state where civil rights minded public officials were extremely scarce, African Americans were forced to choose between the lesser of two evils. The senator secretly met with black leaders to help drum up support for his campaign in African American

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neighborhoods and the nearly 73,000 registered black voters in South Carolina overwhelmingly supported Johnston. Though he remained steadfast in his support for segregation, he did promote economic reforms that were beneficial to black voters. Civil rights activist Modjeska Simkins, for example, charged that Johnston’s support of New Deal and Fair Deal programs that aided blacks made him a more acceptable option than Thurmond. He also received the support of the state’s most influential African American newspaper when the *Lighthouse and Informer* urged its readers to vote for Johnston. In an editorial, the weekly newspaper declared that Johnston’s brand of segregation was preferable to the “Dixiecrat” vision of Thurmond.43

The impact of black ballots on the election was unmistakable. For example, Columbia’s Ward 9, a majority black voting precinct, supported Johnston with 1,249 votes compared to a paltry 72 for Thurmond. John McCray wrote that “60,000” black votes carried Johnston to victory in South Carolina, and the Charleston *News and Courier* reported, “there is little doubt that the colored vote. . . went to Mr. Johnston.” 44

For the most part, Thurmond’s campaign strategy only worked with white voters in the traditional black belt areas. White workers in South Carolina’s textile regions remained loyal to the New Deal coalition and supported Johnston. Thurmond only won five of the 23 counties where textile workers made up at least 10 percent of the population, and each of those five was located near Edgefield, which was Thurmond’s

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home county. Aside from having a “home field” advantage, Thurmond also benefited from white anxieties over the large black population in that region. For example, in Edgefield African Americans made up almost 60 percent of the population, and in nearby McCormick blacks accounted for nearly 63 percent of the total population. Like Edgefield and McCormick, Thurmond did best in counties where blacks were a majority of the population, but a minority on the voting rolls. Twenty of the 28 counties where African Americans accounted for at least 40 percent of the population voted for Thurmond.45

Johnston collected over half of his votes in counties where at least 25 percent of the population was employed in the textile industry where New Deal allegiances were traditionally strong. Furthermore, Johnston defeated Thurmond in towns, cities, and suburbs. The only notable exception was Charleston. Johnston carried Columbia, Beaufort, and Greenville-Spartanburg. Unlike state government representation and Electoral College voting, the malapportionment of votes that gave a greater voice to South Carolina whites in rural counties did not tip the balance of the election to Thurmond. Senators were popularly elected; therefore, the disproportionate voice given to rural white voters in South Carolina did not help the more conservative candidate.46

Race was clearly important in this contest, but white voters did not simply jump on the bandwagon of the candidate who declared himself the most racially conservative


choice, and did not abandon trusted political figures because they were told to do so. In 1950, voter concern for a variety of economic and social issues other than race had not yet been wholly eclipsed by a monolithic public debate on desegregation. Urban whites and white workers in the South Carolina’s textile mills trusted Johnston to defend segregation just as much as they did Thurmond, but deemed the incumbent senator more likely to promote progressive economic reforms while doing so.

For many voters, Thurmond’s alarmism was unwarranted and his portrayal of Johnston as liberal integrationist was preposterous. Many South Carolina whites were reluctant to follow Thurmond’s brand of Dixiecratic separatism because doing so could isolate the state’s business interests and deter federal agencies from steering much needed capital to South Carolina. Nowhere was Thurmond’s post-Dixiecrat militant racism more apparent than in discussions about the issue of education. In fact, during his run for governor, and even in his Dixiecrat campaign, Thurmond had championed federal expenditures on education. In an attempt to ingratiate himself with South Carolina’s segregationist electorate, he changed his views on federally supported public education in the senatorial campaign of 1950.

During his inaugural address in 1947, Thurmond had cautioned voters that “fear of federal aid to education is without foundation.” He insisted, “the effect of federal court decisions requiring equalization between the races will cost the state much more money,” and would “lower the quality of the total school program unless aid [was] received from federal sources.” Three years later, in an address to state legislators, Thurmond concluded that federal aid would eventually mean federal control, and, thus, an end to segregated schools. Thurmond’s comments came as congress was debating on a massive
federal education bill that planned to provide over $14 million dollars for South Carolina schools. Throughout the senate campaign, Thurmond expressed his steadfast opposition to the acceptance of federal education funds in South Carolina. “We have long since learned,” he said, “that federal funds are not free.”

Johnston, on the other hand, claimed that the state could not afford to refuse federal aid, but insisted that the state and local school districts would retain control over how the money was spent. Johnston maintained that “if the federal courts insist on this ruling of equal facilities, then I say, let the federal government pay for it. . . The only way in which we can have equal and separate school facilities is through federal aid.” According to Johnston, if South Carolina declined federal aid, it would be unable to “equalize” black and white schools. Such a failure would result, he claimed, in the court ordered desegregation of South Carolina’s public schools. “The plain truth,” alleged Johnston, “is that state controlled federal aid is the only insurance available for continued segregation of the races.”

Johnston also pointed out that “everything else in the state” received federal monies. Thurmond, who limited his discussion of federal funding to education, refused to take the bait. He did not address South Carolina’s growing reliance on the national defense budget, social welfare programs, and farm subsidies. Johnston, on the other hand, referred simply to the all-encompassing “federal aid. . . expended and controlled by the states.” Implicit in Johnston’s more general language was the notion that the


48 News and Courier (June 13, 1950) 4.
rejection of education funds would lead to the refusal or withdrawal of other federal monies – something which few in South Carolina were willing to consider.\textsuperscript{49}

In truth, South Carolina whites found themselves simultaneously dependent on and at odds with the federal government. In 1950 white South Carolinians still hoped for a political solution to the segregation problem. Though they were discouraged by the federal government’s burgeoning interests in racial matters, white South Carolinians were not yet convinced that federal authorities would challenge local customs beyond demanding compliance with the \textit{Plessy} decision. So, the question for white South Carolinians became: Since we cannot do without federal funding, can we at least manage those monies at the state and local level so as not to jeopardize segregated arrangements?

As Johnston had suggested, the dilemma over federal money went far beyond education funds. It was also apparent at South Carolina’s Cold War military bases. For example, Fort Jackson in Columbia was scheduled for closure in 1949 but the build up for the Korean War saved the facility, which became an important training facility for soldiers headed to Asia. Between 1949 and 1951, city and state leaders fought to keep the economically important base open. Even after Fort Jackson initiated token integration in 1950, local newspaper editors and city leaders conspired to keep news of the base’s desegregation out of the public eye.\textsuperscript{50}

The closest that Thurmond came to mentioning the desegregation of Fort Jackson was when he harangued Johnston for “allowing” President Truman to desegregate the armed forces. Even though Johnston had no direct authority over military matters, the

\textsuperscript{49} News and Courier (June 10, 1950) 3. Campaign Letter to South Carolina Voters (June 26, 1950), Johnston Papers, MPC.

\textsuperscript{50} Myers, “Black, White, and Olive Drab.”
governor charged that Johnston did “nothing” to counter the president’s move. Upon
hearing Thurmond’s accusation, the Senator stood up from his seat and yelled, “I want to
tell you. . . you are a liar!” A visibly angry Thurmond responded by waiting outside the
courthouse, where he attempted to attack Johnston as the senator exited the building.
After the two candidates were physically separated, Johnston bragged that “after the
campaign,” he would “fix up” Thurmond. “I was a boxer in the army and I’ll knock the
hell out of him in one blow,” said Johnston. In the end, the exchange was remembered
more for the two men’s histrionics than for their discussion of desegregation in the
military.\textsuperscript{51}

Generally, Thurmond was unable to convince enough white voters to reject federal
money of any kind. According to historian Kari Fredrickson, Thurmond and the
Dixiecrats achieved so much success in 1948 precisely because the organization had
persuaded southerners to unify against the menace of federal authority. Rural elites and
business leaders had combined forces to maintain the privileges of whiteness. Two years
later it was Olin Johnston who most effectively called for unity. While Thurmond
advocated breaking away from the national party, Johnston encouraged southerners to
work together in Congress to thwart civil rights legislation, and he did so while
simultaneously promising to maintain a high level of federal investment in South
Carolina’s economy. Unlike Thurmond, who called for a continuation of Dixiecrat-like
political separatism, Johnston insisted that it was possible to retain a large measure of
local control over federal money. Combined with his long history of protecting

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{News and Courier} (June 27, 1950) 1.
segregation, the support of working whites, and the unlikely support of South Carolina’s African American voters, this agenda ultimately carried the senator to victory.\textsuperscript{52}

Still, Thurmond’s ability to capture over 40 percent of the vote against an avowed segregationist like Johnston was evidence that some incendiary race-baiting was an effective campaign strategy for winning considerable numbers of white votes, especially in the state’s black belt. Had Thurmond faced an opponent whose reputation for white supremacy did not equal his own (such as Senator Maybank), he may have been even more successful. Nonetheless, even this limited success worried black activists who determined that the only defense against future race-baiting during election season was to prove that black ballots were as important in each election as they had been in the Thurmond-Johnston race. This was no easy task. Though they were instrumental in the senatorial primary, black voters had almost no effect in the Rivers-Clement contest. African American leaders realized that without additional electoral success they would be unable to convince many white politicians to address black concerns.

It was with this strategy in mind that African Americans in Charleston soon attempted to recreate the coalition that helped elect Johnston in 1950. In the Charleston mayoral election of 1951 Clement and other prominent members of Charleston’s black community endorsed O.T. Wallace, a moderate white. Wallace returned the “favor” by openly campaigning to black voters. Voting machines were located in Clement’s insurance office and in an A.M.E church. For his efforts, Wallace received scathing rebukes from the \textit{News and Courier}. The Charleston daily declared that Wallace was pandering to African American “bloc-voting,” and even accused Wallace of making

\textsuperscript{52} Frederickson, \textit{Dixiecrat Revolt}, 200-216.
backdoor promises to black community. Clement countered that whites had engaged in “bloc-voting” based on “racism” for 50 years and proclaimed that whites had “put men into office and statutes on the books that” made African Americans “go in side doors, sit in galleries, ride in the rear of buses.” With the help of many black voters Wallace was able to force a run-off election with William Morrison. Morrison easily defeated Wallace in the run off by winning nearly all the white vote, but Wallace did retain significant support in the mostly black areas of Charleston. In the wards with the highest concentration of black residents he received almost 4,000 votes compared to Morrison’s total of just over 3,300. Wallace’s strong showing was worrisome for segregationists because it demonstrated that ambitious white candidates might be willing to ally themselves with African Americans. White South Carolinians recognized that any further extension of voting rights to African Americans could create the potential for such a coalition to unseat conservative white officeholders and thus ensuring that South Carolina’s white supremacists would seek to undermine white moderates while simultaneously limiting black political activism.53

As Mendel Rivers had suggested during his campaign against Clement, it was the possibility of an increase in these kinds of moderate biracial alliances that most worried South Carolina segregationists. White leaders understood that if they adopted a hard-line stance against federal intervention they risked losing the support of mainstream whites who – for the time being at least – were equally concerned with economic issues. The senatorial primary election in 1950 had divided white voters and revealed the fragile nature of white solidarity on the segregation issue. Of course, it also demonstrated to

South Carolina’s political elite that most whites wanted to maintain the status quo and forestall dramatic racial change. More important, however, the election proved that when whites were politically divided African American votes could turn the tide of a close election to a more moderate candidate. In the wake of those realizations, it seemed to South Carolina’s mainstream segregationists that white unity would be the most effective tool in the fight to preserve the racial hierarchy in South Carolina.
CHAPTER 4
STRADDLING THE FENCE: POLITICS AND AMBIGUITY ON THE EVE OF BROWN

In the pre-Brown period, most white South Carolinians endorsed measures that threatened militant resistance to forced desegregation, such as public school closure, but had not given up hope that a political or bureaucratic solution could halt, or at least slow the pace of, racial change before the state would actually need to carry out those threats. More moderate whites understood that, until the courts reached a final verdict in Briggs v. Elliott, there were other less incendiary ways of forestalling significant racial change in South Carolina. Moreover, even after that case was settled, most white realized that the state’s response would depend on the federal government’s willingness and ability to enforce the United States Supreme Court’s decision, and that was by no means clear. As this chapter reveals, the tensions and ambiguities created by those uncertainties were exposed during the presidential election of 1952 as the debate over the relative merits of accepting federal funds and the restrictions that came with them began to take on a more anxious tone.

Differing commitments to resisting desegregation, a multitude of competing economic concerns, and lingering apprehensions over the future of public education in South Carolina created an uncertain political environment for the state’s white elected officials. Even though hardcore segregationists had used legislative malapportionment, white fear, and a potent propaganda campaign to control the public debate over desegregation in the early 1950s. The 1950 primary elections had confirmed that whites
in the upstate textile regions and urban areas were as influenced by economic concerns as they were by the emerging challenges to Jim Crow.

At the forefront of white economic concerns was a determination to maintain a high level of federal spending in South Carolina. Even middle and working class whites who demanded a militant resistance to encroachments on white privilege tended to demand more not less federal aid. Federal jobs, especially defense industry jobs in South Carolina’s black belt, were viewed by many working class whites as a path into the middle class and toward economic security. Therefore, even as tensions over the desegregation crisis began to escalate in the mid-to-late 1950s, white elites were under enormous pressure to maintain the flow of defense dollars into South Carolina.

South Carolina’s segregationist leaders were mindful of these concerns and, despite a near uniform devotion to segregation, the state’s most uncompromising white supremacists worried that some white backsliders might eventually endorse a compromise on the desegregation issue if it came with desirable economic benefits. Therefore, the architects of South Carolina’s strategy for preserving Jim Crow worked to find legal and legislative solutions that would attract hardcore segregationists without jeopardizing support from more moderate whites. During the campaign for Governor James F. Byrnes’s equalization plan, for example, Lieutenant Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr., First District Congressman L. Mendel Rivers, and other equalization advocates argued that the plan would cure multiple problems. In addition to the governor’s pledge that equalization would help preserve segregation in education Byrnes and his supporters also promised that it would improve South Carolina’s failing school systems and, therefore, promote economic improvements.
Whites understood that federal monies threatened to jeopardize local control, thereby complicating white desires for both economic advancement and less federal interference. Although a few white leaders, such as former Governor Strom Thurmond and Byrnes, had questioned whether the state could maintain both its reliance on federal funds and its autonomy to manage race relations, most elected officers ignored those worries and argued that insisting on local control of such monies was more prudent than refusing them altogether – even when those demands were ignored by bureaucrats in Washington D.C. After all, the looming threat of civil rights activism was not an entirely new phenomenon. South Carolinians had evaded federal nondiscrimination efforts before. For example, during World War II, authorities at the Charleston Naval Yard had essentially ignored the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). Local officials were charged with enforcing the rules regarding equality in the workplace and, in Charleston, they simply allowed significant racial discrimination to continue. Encouraged by their ability to circumvent executive order 8802 in South Carolina’s defense industry, state leaders were confident that, even if the courts did order the desegregation of white schools, deadlines for compliance could be pushed back years or even decades. Many elected officers hoped that lax federal enforcement of court-ordered desegregation would help diminish the scope of racial change and slow the pace of compliance to less than a crawl.¹

Whether or not the state could continue to utilize such evasive tactics, however, was an unanswered question in the early to mid-1950s. Regardless, white economic leaders continued to demand an active federal role in the state’s local economies. John E.

Hills, the Executive Secretary of the Columbia Merchants Association, for instance, wrote to United States Senator Burnet Maybank in May 1952 to express his delight at the “possibility that more troops may be sent” to the desegregated Fort Jackson. Hills bragged that Columbia offered “the superior advantage of having available jobs and excellent housing facilities, including an enormous project not yet completed, for the families of service men.”

Maybank, like most other South Carolina politicians, recognized that federal monies were one of his most important sources of political capital. The senator told Columbia Mayor J. Macfie Anderson that he had made “repeated request for additional troops at Jackson.” Maybank also promised to “use whatever influence I have on the subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee,” to bring more money the South Carolina midlands. Still, Anderson worried that, as part of the post-World War II military downsizing, the base might be threatened with closure. “Fort Jackson means a lot to Columbia,” the mayor wrote, “and we would hate to have this happen again if the Korean situation were settled.”

Anderson’s call for an increase in the number of troops stationed at Fort Jackson occurred shortly after the United States Congress debated a measure to allow all deployed service men and women to vote with absentee ballots. In March 1952, Truman proposed a “Servicemen’s Bill of Rights.” The proposition declared that all military personnel

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2 John E. Hills to Burnet R. Maybank (May 2, 1952) Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.

should be able to vote in primary and general elections without paying a poll tax, without registering in person, and without “unreasonable” restrictions, such as literacy tests. Much to the chagrin of southern segregationists, the legislation would have extended the vote to every African American soldier on deployment.4

As the state moved closer to the elections of 1952, however, questions about the state’s ability to control congressionally allocated funds became more numerous. Though they attempted to minimize the federal oversight that came with this revenue, South Carolina’s elected representatives were not always successful in preventing the expansion of federal jurisdiction. For instance, when First District Congressman L. Mendel Rivers called for a plan of “optional segregation” for military trainees, the House Armed Services Committee rejected his proposal even though a fellow southerner, Georgia Congressman Carl Vinson, chaired the committee.5

As had been the case since the Dixiecrat defection in 1948, the contradictory nature of the state’s relationship to the federal government created tensions within South Carolina’s one-party political system. Even more moderate South Carolinians, such as Senator Burnet Maybank, occasionally preached opposition to the national Democratic Party even though his rank within that party allowed him to secure significant investments in the South Carolina economy. Maybank had been a staunch New Dealer and was committed to most of the Democratic Party’s economic and foreign policy programs, but, in the spring of 1952 even he called on the Charleston County Democratic Committee to oppose the “weird, socialistic and unsound proposals,” of the national

4 Ibid.

party. “We Southern Democrats,” wrote Maybank, “have a great responsibility at this period of or National life and I hope that we will all stand together with sufficient strength to insist on the Party adhering to its basic Jeffersonian principles and following its historic policies.”

Despite these apprehensions and frustrations with the national party, nearly every southern Democrat shared a hope that party leaders would find a way to alleviate these acute partisan divisions before the upcoming presidential election. In the spring of 1952, many white South Carolinians placed their hopes for party reconciliation with the presidential candidacy of Georgia Senator Richard Russell, who was one of the region’s most prominent segregationist leaders. On February 29, 1952 the South Carolina General Assembly adopted a concurrent resolution that endorsed the senator’s candidacy for the Democratic nomination for the presidency and praised Russell as “eminently qualified for that high honor.” It claimed that he stood for “constitutional Government, the American way of life, the rights of the States” and lauded Russell’s “integrity and knowledge of the workings of our Government.”

Nevertheless, even with the endorsement of the South Carolina legislature and numerous other southern political leaders, Russell had very little chance of winning the nomination. The greater likelihood of a Democratic nominee emerging with at least a modest interest in civil rights reforms worried South Carolina Democrats. The “political situation in South Carolina,” warned Maybank “is very bad for the Democrats.” Moreover, he predicted that either of the top Republican candidates, Dwight D.

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6 Burnet Maybank to J.P. Wilcox, Chairman of the Charleston County Democratic Executive Committee (April 7, 1952), Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.

7 Copy of the Resolution from the Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.
Eisenhower and Senator Robert Taft, could carry the state. “The people are very bitter about the Civil Rights Program, the Supreme Court opinions, etc.,” explained Maybank.8

Senator Maybank’s worries took on an even more serious note after numerous prominent white South Carolinians endorsed Eisenhower in the presidential contest. H. Sanford Howie, Jr. of Greenville, for example, wrote to Byrnes to encourage the governor to lend his support to Eisenhower unless, of course, a pro-segregation southerner was named as the Democratic nominee. “Too long we have allowed the Northern wing of the party to completely ignore our interests and candidates,” Howie warned. He claimed that “to vote Republican. . . would not mean a divorce from the Democratic Party.”9

This growing resentment of the national Democratic Party, Eisenhower’s personal appeal, and increased GOP overtures to southern voters made the outcome of the presidential election of 1952 especially hard to predict. Furthermore, the elimination of legal limits on participation in primary elections by Judge J. Waties Waring in Brown v. Baskin had helped to foster an increase of nearly 140 percent in the number of registered voters in South Carolina between 1948 and 1952. According to political scientist Gregory Sampson these “new, relatively independent party members” were less inclined to trust party elders, and more likely to take an unpredictable path at the polls. This trend was exemplified by a new “grass roots citizens’ club” in Charleston that urged its members to capture control of local Democratic Party machinery so its members could

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8 Maybank to Wright Morrow, Democratic National Committeeman for Texas (January 11, 1952), Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.

9 H. Sanford Howie, Jr. to James F. Byrnes (July 11, 1952) copy in the Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.
more effectively pressure the national party to reverse its drift toward the political left.

By the spring of 1952 similar grass roots organizations had formed throughout the South Carolina black belt and began to function as loosely organized interests groups within South Carolina’s Democratic Party.10

Despite this uncertain and fluid context the South Carolina Democratic Party still hoped to avoid another contentious schism like the one that blossomed during the 1948 presidential election. Nonetheless, every indication was that the party remained divided into two distinct factions. Democratic loyalists and their political allies who had opposed the Dixiecrat revolt and supported the New Deal and its Fair Deal successor held most of the major leadership positions in the state party. The loyalist faction was particularly popular with the state’s large population of white textile workers and with some white farmers in the piedmont and upstate regions. The more conservative faction was personified by Governors Byrnes and Thurmond. It promoted racial conservatism and a pro-business environment. The new grass roots groups tended to side with the Byrnes wing of the party and served to exacerbate the existing political rift by attempting to challenge the leadership of loyalists like State Senator Edgar Brown, House Speaker Sol Blatt, and Senator Olin D. Johnston. The loyalist faction, however, was deeply entrenched in the Democratic Party’s power structure and was able to limit the influence of the new organizations. After finding it difficult to undermine the more entrenched

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members of the party, the citizens’ clubs refocused their efforts on organizing a
campaign to place Eisenhower on the state’s ballot as an “independent.” 11

Though their impact was limited within the Democratic Party, these new groups
were able to exert enormous political pressure on some South Carolina politicians. For
example, one group, the Grass Roots Crusade, targeted Congressman Rivers with subtle
reminders of his white constituents’ allegiance to “states’ rights.” In many ways, Rivers
was an unlikely target for any conservative political organization. He was a diehard
segregationists and a strict anti-communist. Nonetheless, his uncertain efforts to navigate
the intersections of local and national politics regarding racial and sectional concerns
encapsulated the dilemmas facing white segregationist politicians on the eve of the
Brown decision. Despite his record, the Colleton County Grass Roots Crusade wrote to
Rivers in April 1952 and urged the congressman to use his “best efforts to protect States’
Rights . . . and to see that the Constitution is preserved.” Rivers wholeheartedly agreed
and bragged to the organization that he had spoken out on the issue of “States Rights’ in
1948,” and wished the Grass Roots Crusade had been around then to take action. “I shall
continue to exert every effort to see that States’ Rights are upheld,” promised Rivers.
What remained to be seen, however, was how Rivers would traverse another Dixiecrat-
like political schism within his own party. Though the congressman and the newly

11 The various factions of the South Carolina Democratic Party are discussed in: Kari Frederickson, The
Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina
Press, 2001). Howard Quint, Profile in Black and White: A Frank Portrait of South Carolina (Washington
in South Carolina, 1876-1962, (c.1965, no publication information available). Paul Quattlebaum to James
Lee Platt, Myrtle Beach News (March 15, 1952). Quattlebaum Papers, Thurmond Institute.

11 For information on Thurmond’s “sabbatical” see Jack Bass and Marilyn Thompson, Ol’ Strom: an
Thompson, Strom: The Complicated Personal and Political Life of Strom Thurmond (New York: Public
Affairs, 2005) 136-152. For a discussion of Byrnes relationship with the “Dixiecrats” after 1948, see
Frederickson, The Dixiecrat Revolt, 180-229.
organized pressure group seemed to be in complete agreement, the Grass Roots Crusade was less committed to party loyalty than Rivers, who had narrowly avoided the loss of congressional seniority for his participation in the Dixiecrat revolt.\(^{12}\)

What little unity that was left in South Carolina’s Democratic Party was tested in July when both major parties held their national conventions. Although it was not as contentious as the 1948 convention, the Democratic National Convention revealed continued factionalism and dissent within the party. For example, the convention members approved a measure that required delegates to sign a loyalty pledge promising to vote for whoever was the official nominee of the party. In anticipation of a fight over the party’s civil rights plank, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Virginia, declined to comply with the pledge, but, in an effort to avoid the walkouts that had plagued the convention in 1948, each of the rebellious delegations was eventually seated.\(^{13}\)

In this environment of rancor and division, deciding on a nominee proved difficult for the Democratic delegates. Convention attendees made several efforts to find a candidate who could unite the fractured party before nominating Adlai Stevenson. Though he was more liberal than many of the southern delegates would have liked, Stevenson was generally viewed as a moderate candidate who was unlikely to push for rapid change in the South’s Jim Crow system. Stevenson did, however, hold an unfavorable view of racial segregation. To decrease the likelihood of another southern walk-out, a concession was made with the naming of Alabama Senator John J. Sparkman.

\(^{12}\) Alice T. Beckett, Secretary of the Colleton County Citizens Grass Roots Crusade, to L. Mendel Rivers (April 21, 1952), L. Mendel Rivers to Alice T. Beckett, April 23, 1952, Rivers Papers, SCHS.

as the party’s vice-presidential candidate. Sparkman was a moderate, but his record confirmed that he would use his authority to support the maintenance of segregation.

Commenting on his nomination, The Nation declared:

If the nomination of Sparkman was a slap in the face of the Negro voters, it was given a special sting by the dishonest attempt to induce Negroes to accept him as something he is not and to justify his record on the grounds that, after all, a Southern liberal must hedge on civil rights measures.\(^{14}\)

African Americans within the convention were equally outraged. Fifty black delegates led by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell of New York bolted the convention. “They can cram a candidate down our throat, but they cannot make us vote for him,” declared Powell.\(^{15}\)

Both parties adopted a civil rights plank in their platforms, but the Republicans seemed less inclined to disregard states’ rights in favor of federal intervention in racial matters. Their plank stated: “We believe that it is the primary responsibility of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions.” Still, the Republicans conceded, “the Federal Government should take supplemental action within its constitutional jurisdiction to oppose discrimination against race, religion or national origin.” The Democrats avoided any explicit discussion of states’ rights and adopted a much more forceful civil rights plank, calling for “efforts to eradicate discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin.”\(^{16}\)

South Carolina Democratic loyalists recognized the need to rally party members in the face of doubts about the national Democrats’ commitment to states’ rights, and were

\(^{14}\) *The Nation* (August 1952).

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

also faced with the unenviable task of countering Republican overtures to southern whites. By the fall of 1952 a growing faction within the Republican Party, led by Senator Robert Taft of Ohio, had stated its support of curtailing the rapid expansion of the federal government. Though many southerners may not have agreed wholeheartedly with Taft’s particular brand of conservatism, any rhetoric that called for limits on federal activism were appealing to diehard segregationists who feared an active federal role in the expansion of black civil and political rights. Moreover, conservative Republicans, such as Taft, openly supported states’ rights and the GOP’s nominee, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, was generally viewed as the more conservative candidate in the presidential election. After nearly a century of one-party rule in the South, more southern whites than ever began to question their loyalty to the Democratic Party.

Greenville Mayor J. Kenneth Cass called the Democratic separatists “rebel rousers,” while Edgar Brown, who directed the Stevenson-Sparkman campaign in South Carolina, predicted that “many good people” would vote for Eisenhower, and that the Republican supporters would “organize a definite Eisenhower campaign and try to make a strong showing in the State.” To counter this challenge Brown insisted that “rallies,” “speakers,” “radio programs,” and a significant fundraising effort would be necessary to support the Stevenson campaign in South Carolina. The Democratic Party stalwart was clearly worried about the rising popular support for the Republican nominee.17

Brown and Cass had good reasons to be alarmed. In the late summer and early fall Governor James F. Byrnes, Mount Pleasant Mayor Francis Coleman, and former Charleston Mayor Thomas P. Stoney all announced their support of Eisenhower. Stoney

17 J. Kenneth Case to Burnet R. Maybank (August 8, 1952), Edgar Brown to Burnet R. Maybank (August 8, 1952), Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.
went so far as to say, “Stevenson has a loaded gun and its pointed at the heart of the South.” Coleman declared, “If we endorse the national party platform, it will be a mandate to the United States Supreme Court to do away with segregation in the South. I beg you not to endorse the nominees of the Democratic national party and thus put a straitjacket on South Carolina,” and Byrnes proclaimed, “I shall place loyalty to my country above loyalty to a political party and vote for General Dwight D. Eisenhower.” The GOP nominee was also promised positive press coverage in the black belt areas when he received the endorsements of prominent newspapermen Thomas R. Waring and William D. Workman. 18

Of course, Byrnes and other state Democrats could support Eisenhower without the threat of losing congressional seniority in Washington D.C. With leading South Carolina Democrats divided over how best to respond to the nominees and platforms of the two major parties, and confronted by the formation of a grass roots revolt against the national party, the state’s congressional representatives were left with a difficult decision. Initially, the entire South Carolina contingent to the United States Congress decided that the threat of losing seniority was so strong that each of the state’s congressmen gave his support to Stevenson. 19

Like his fellow congressmen, Rivers endorsed Stevenson. However, he also signed the petition calling on the state party not to punish individuals who in good conscience voted “independent.” Rivers was in a particularly precarious situation as he attempted to strike a balance between his outraged constituents and the threat of losing his seniority

18 Ibid. The State (September 19, 1952) 1. News and Courier (August 20, 1952) 3A.
19 L. Mendel Rivers to Paul Quattlebaum, Jr. (August 20, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
within the national Democratic Party. The congressman’s district had a substantial number of hardcore segregationists and his attempt to have his cake and eat it too was unpopular with the leadership of the Grass Roots Crusade. Crusade member and former State Senator Paul Quattlebaum felt Rivers’ decision to sign the resolution allowing Democrats to vote for Eisenhower without repercussions while formally endorsing Stevenson was hypocritical. He told the congressman, “I have always supported you because we could tell how you stood. But this issue puts you in the same boat with [Senators] Maybank and Johnston. I did not think that I would ever see you ride the fence.”

Rivers worried that an organized attack from even a small white pressure group would undermine his credibility with segregationist voters. Though he was unlikely to face a serious challenge from the political right, Rivers did worry that a divided conservative vote would create an opportunity for a biracial moderate alliance to emerge in the Low Country region. Moreover, he chaffed at the suggestion that he was less than forthright about his commitment to states’ rights and was insulted by any questions about his devotion to the preservation of Jim Crow. In a letter to Quattlebaum, he wrote:

I know the generous spirit which prompted your letter and I can assure you I accept it as such. I am amazed you didn’t know I was against this [Truman] administration. I believe I have been more outspoken than any other South Carolinian. I am also amazed that you think I am straddling the fence. I have stated publicly I propose to vote for the Stevenson-Sparkman Ticket unless pressure groups make it impossible for me to do so. This is still my position. If Stevenson and Sparkman should attack the institutions of the South as did Truman in ’48, I would oppose them as I did Truman and I would advocate a third party. This year things are not similar.

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20 Paul Quattlebaum, Jr. to L. Mendel Rivers (August 16, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.

21 L. Mendel Rivers to Paul Quattlebaum, Jr. (August 20, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
Nonetheless, Rivers understood that Eisenhower had received a groundswell of popular support in South Carolina and that most of those endorsements had come from the First Congressional District. Ever the political pragmatist, Rivers left the door open for a political change of heart and insisted, “I have not made up my mind the part I propose to take in this campaign other than vote.” Conveniently, he arranged to be out of the country on a congressional trip for most of September so that he would have little “time to take much part in the campaign.” Rivers, like many southern Democrats, hoped to protect his congressional seniority without taking part in the presidential campaign.22

His attempt to juggle contradictory agendas, however, became even more problematic in the wake of the South Carolina Democratic Convention. Less than three weeks after the convention, members of the Grass Roots Crusade and other citizens’ groups banded together to form South Carolinians for Eisenhower. The organization, which was directed by Columbia attorney George Warren, circulated a petition to place an independent slate of electors on the ballot. In less than a month it had over 50,000 signatures. Few members of South Carolinians for Eisenhower had previous political experience, but the group was able to mount a well-organized and well-funded campaign in a relatively short time. Its biggest supporter was Governor Byrnes, who not only endorsed the movement but also campaigned across the state for Eisenhower’s candidacy.23

22 Ibid.

Still, even with the endorsement of Byrnes and a strong grass roots following in the black belt, Eisenhower had a tough row to hoe in South Carolina. He was on the ticket as an independent, but voters knew that a victory for Eisenhower would place a Republican in the White House for the first time in two decades. Former Charleston Mayor Thomas Stoney worried that “unless we can get down to the precinct level and really sell the littler farmer and the textile employees on just what the National Democratic platform, if carried out, will mean to them, I am very much afraid that we are whistling in the dark.” In response to such fears, the Grass Roots Crusade handed out pamphlets and collected campaign contributions on behalf of the South Carolinians for Eisenhower. The new group quickly became a large mainstream organization and established a headquarters at the Jefferson Hotel in Columbia. South Carolinians for Eisenhower was so successful that it quickly eclipsed the state’s small Republican Party in both numbers and organization.  

One possible problem for the independent movement, however, was that Eisenhower’s name appeared on the ballot twice. The printed ballot had a column for the Republican Party on the left side, the Democrats in the middle, and the independent electors for Eisenhower on the right. The organization spent a significant amount of time urging voters to support the independent movement and not split the Eisenhower vote by voting in the Republican column. Pamphlets told voters: “To vote for IKE, vote on the

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right.” By the end of the election, even South Carolina’s Republican Party had called on its members to vote for their candidate in the independent column.25

The members of South Carolinians for Eisenhower and other southern Eisenhower supporters were especially encouraged when the former general made a campaign swing through the region. Before the 1952 campaign, presidential electioneering by the GOP rarely took place in the South. Eisenhower, however, exploited the white southern perception that Democratic Party leaders were taking the section for granted. The Republican candidate told a Little Rock audience, “There is a mounting mass of evidence, to show that you are in no one’s column, that you are not in a captive precinct, and you are going to express your judgment and your decisions as you see fit.” Eisenhower also made a stop in Columbia, South Carolina, during which he promised to uphold the constitutional principle of states’ rights. In the Palmetto State, his visit was not sponsored by the Republican Party, but by South Carolinians for Eisenhower and Governor Byrnes.26

Thanks to such efforts, the Republican became the candidate of choice for many black belt whites who began to pressure local political leaders to jump on the Eisenhower bandwagon. Rivers told Representative E.E. Cox of Georgia’s Second Congressional District:

In my locality people are frenzied. Just about everybody who is anybody is supporting Eisenhower. It is very possible that I will have to make a strong statement in his behalf before the election. I have never seen such bitter opposition to Truman and Stevenson as exists in the whole South Carolina Low country from Columbia – South. I am not certain Eisenhower can carry South Carolina, but he is

25 Ibid.

going to get a whale of a vote . . . Jim Byrnes is really going to bat for Eisenhower. He made a fire-eating speech in my hometown of Charleston last night and I am waiting to get the results.²⁷

Three days later, on October 25, Rivers caved to constituent pressure and issued a public statement endorsing Eisenhower. Eager to rationalize his abandonment of Stevenson, Rivers professed his loyalty to the Democratic Party of John C. Calhoun, Thomas Jefferson, and Wade Hampton, but claimed that the national party had “been captured” and was “controlled by elements with ideologies foreign to democracy.” He insisted the party’s turn to the left was a result of dangerous outsiders with communistic ideas. In a nod to Cold War xenophobia, Rivers declared, “America has been a mecca for many people from across the seas. They have come to this country and grown rich beyond their wildest dreams, and many of them now seek to change the very type and form of Government under which they have waxed so rich. Many of these people are now charting the course of the National Democratic Party.” Although Rivers never explained who “these people” were, his diatribe struck a chord with white southerners who were similarly convinced that “outsiders” were intent on wreaking havoc with their way of life.²⁸

Rivers worked throughout the fall to convince voters he had not changed his basic ideological position. “When Governor Stevenson was nominated at Chicago, I had hopes that he would lead the party of our fathers back to the road of States Rights and local government,” said Rivers, but “upon my return from a harrowing trip abroad, I find that the Democratic campaign has sunk to a low typical of” Fair Deal supporters. He claimed

²⁷ L. Mendel Rivers to E.E. Cox (October 22, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.

²⁸ “Statement by Congressman L. Mendel Rivers” (October 25, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
Truman had taken over the campaign and pointed out that, in a recent speech in New York, the president “proclaimed a strong Civil Rights program. He advocated a Federal FEPC law of the strongest kind, with ‘teeth in it.’” According to Rivers, Stevenson had vigorously supported these proposals. Rivers, who was no stranger to hyperbole, warned his constituents that his decision to support the independent movement could cost him his “political job,” but he claimed any other action would cost him his “self-respect.” “It is often the practice of some Democrats, when they don’t like their candidate, to ‘go fishing’ come Election Day,” said Rivers, “I call these men cowards.” The congressman argued that it was “the responsibility of every good citizen” to vote.29

Once Rivers made the jump onto the Eisenhower bandwagon he was a vocal leader in the independent movement. He told his constituents that he was well within his rights as a South Carolina Democrat to support Eisenhower. The state party had given permission for any Democrat to stand up in defense of “states rights.” Rivers announced, “I followed this course in 1948 . . . Only a fool would think that I have changed during that short span of years.” He insisted, “To me, however, the responsibility of every good citizen is to vote his, or her, honest convictions, and I insist on having a similar right, and I will take it . . . I am not a slave and will never be pulling an oar on the galley ship of State. Come Election Day, it is my intention to cast my vote for the Democratic electors for Eisenhower.”30

29 Ibid.

Privately, however, Rivers was less dogmatic. In his letter to Georgia Representative Cox he wrote, “I have made it my policy to always do everything my constituents ask . . . I always also try to straddle every fence on which I can conveniently stand on both sides.” Rivers, like most other politicians in South Carolina’s black belt, chose not to fight the political currents sweeping through the Low Country. Despite his public pronouncements, Rivers knew that the Stevenson campaign had not changed its message since the convention. No subsequent statement by Stevenson had called for civil rights more forcefully than did the platform adopted at the party’s convention. If anything, Stevenson had purposely tried to distance himself from Truman and his civil rights programs. What had changed since the convention, however, was the level of support for Eisenhower in the Low Country; a phenomenon which reflected both the personal appeal of the Republican candidate and increased white anxiety about the perceived civil rights agenda of the Democratic Party. These political realities prompted Rivers decision to break ranks with Stevenson and support Eisenhower.31

In a very short time, South Carolinians for Eisenhower had built a powerful campaign and altered the state election ballots. By Election Day, over 53,000 voters had signed petitions to place Eisenhower on the ballot as an independent. That support was so strong that the Republican Party had attempted to remove itself from the ballot so as not to confuse voters, but the ballots had already been printed. Moreover, South

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Carolinians for Eisenhower had raised nearly $100,000 within South Carolina and pressured politicians, like Rivers, to jump on the Eisenhower bandwagon.32

Although Rivers agonized over his decision and was a latecomer to the cause, the choice to support Eisenhower was, ultimately, not a difficult one for many South Carolina whites. The former general seemed to transcend party affiliation. He was a popular leader with widespread name recognition and most South Carolinians considered him the most racially conservative candidate. Of course, many southerners were also impressed by Eisenhower’s notable military credentials. For some, it was his military career that lent credence to the notion that he would also maintain high levels of federal spending at defense installations. The combination of these factors made Eisenhower an appealing candidate to white South Carolinians. His perceived racial conservatism attracted hardcore segregationists and more moderate whites who feared that increased federal interests in the management of local race relations would push more and more whites into the hardcore camp. Indeed, for most whites it appeared as if Eisenhower was the candidate most likely to slow federal involvement in civil rights matters while simultaneously maintaining a high degree of Cold War military spending in the South.

It was no coincidence then that the Stevenson-Sparkman campaign’s most concerted attempt to diminish Eisenhower’s appeal in the black belt was targeted at defense workers. The Democrats implied that a Republican victory would cause the loss of jobs in Low Country defense industries. Stevenson campaign officials argued that Eisenhower would dole out patronage to Republican congressmen and limit funding to “Democratic” states. No South Carolinian was in a better position to refute such claims

32 “Slim Suttle’s Viewing the South from Washington: Weekly Review of the Washington Scene As it Affects the South” (October 31, 1952), from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.
than Rivers. The congressman’s position on the Armed Services Committee and his reputation for steering defense dollars to the region made him a local authority on military spending. “It is an insult to the intelligence of these fine, patriotic Americans for these self-styled leaders of the Stevenson movement to try to pressure these employees into believing that a vote for Eisenhower would affect these installations,” Rivers insisted. Congressman Rivers encouraged workers at Charleston’s naval shipyard to “vote as they please,” and he promised if they voted for the Republican presidential candidate they would get “every protection guaranteed by the Civil Service.” Rivers explained that the funding for Charleston’s military installations was “specifically set aside by law and can be used for no other purpose,” and was not, therefore dependent on who was elected to the presidency.  

Despite such fierce opposition from Rivers and Byrnes, Stevenson won the state in 1952. He collected over 170,000 votes compared to Eisenhower’s 165,000. Loyal Democratic voters in the piedmont and upstate regions of the state voted two to one in favor of Stevenson. The votes of white textile workers and the strong support of African American voters helped the Stevenson-Sparkman ticket achieve one of its few victories. Republicans did, however, learn an important lesson during the election. Eisenhower’s strong showing verified that the “Solid South” was cracking. Eisenhower overwhelmingly carried the black-belt areas where fears of widespread racial change were most acute. Rivers’s First Congressional District provided the most support for the independent ballot, casting over 65 percent of its vote to Eisenhower. The Republican also won the Second Congressional District, which included the area around Columbia,

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33 News and Courier (October 30, 1952), from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.
with 60 percent of the combined independent and GOP vote, and the Sixth District with 50.29 percent. Eisenhower supporters tended to be white working class voters who were not employed in the textile industry and who lived near large African American communities. Thus, it is not surprising that Eisenhower carried many of the same voters who had supported Strom Thurmond’s bid for the Senate in 1950. However, the Republican also added a large number of white-collar workers in Charleston and Columbia to Thurmond’s totals.34

As had been the case for Olin Johnston in the senatorial primary in 1950, the deciding factor for the overall success of the Stevenson campaign was the increased African American electorate. Though Stevenson made almost no official effort to reach out to black voters in South Carolina, African Americans were more comfortable with the Democratic candidate than they were with the more conservative Eisenhower. In fact, African American voters were more likely to support Thurmond in 1948 than Eisenhower in 1952. In an election post-mortem, Governor Byrnes estimated that about 59,000 black voters had cast their ballots for the national Democrat. According to the governor, nearly all of Eisenhower’s votes came from white voters. Thus, Eisenhower carried the state’s white vote by a significant margin. Political correspondent Raymond Moley concluded that Stevenson’s total vote amongst South Carolina whites was a scant 114,000. Byrnes concluded that South Carolina whites jumped on the Eisenhower bandwagon because they feared the “socialistic policies” adopted by the Truman Administration. He also

34 These totals include the ballots cast in both the Republican and Independent columns. In the election the ballot totals were not combined. Had Eisenhower collected more total votes than Stevenson, but collected less ballots for the Independent ticket he still would have lost the state. News and Courier (November 11, 1952) 1A. Sampson, “The Rise of the ‘New’ Republican Party in South Carolina,” 230-232.
pointed out that Truman supported the FEPC, the repeal of the Taft-Hartley law, and had bungled the situation in Korea.\footnote{Raymond Moley, “A Political Perspective,” \textit{Newsweek} (December 15, 1952) 108. “Byrnes, Ike, and the South,” \textit{Newsweek} (December 15, 1952) 31.}

After Eisenhower’s election, South Carolinians for Eisenhower chose to remain a non-partisan advocacy group. Most of its members, however, refused to abandon the Democratic Party. In spite of strains among white voters in South Carolina and the national Democratic Party, at the local level South Carolina remained essentially a one party state in the 1950s. The past two presidential elections had demonstrated disunity and factionalism within that party, but those divisions had not led to the growth of a viable opposition party in state elections. The Republican Party had little to no official structure, almost no ability to raise funds for candidates, and was incapable of electing anyone to a statewide office. In other words, the road to political success in South Carolina was through the state Democratic Party and few whites were willing to abandon those advantages. Instead, they chose to provide a local voice of dissent against the national party’s interests in civil rights causes. Remaining in the Democratic Party also meant that the group’s members could become a forceful informal advocacy group and a potent source of criticism for candidates across the state.\footnote{Sampson, “The Rise of the ‘New Republican Party in South Carolina,” 230-264. “Byrnes, Ike, and the South,” \textit{Newsweek} (December 15, 1952) 31.}

Because of the newfound power of Eisenhower supporters in state politics, the election had exacerbated tensions within the Democratic Party as a whole. State leaders may have been able to abandon Democratic candidates during national elections without risking their status in the party, but the loss of congressional seniority was a very real
threat to the state’s representatives in Washington D.C. Even though congressional Democrats had chosen not to punish Dixiecrat defectors in 1948, there was no guarantee that their generosity would continue. Rivers, for example, was very concerned about sanctions from the national Democratic Party. He was determined to stay on the House Armed Services Committee, even if it meant changing his party affiliation. After the election the congressman wrote to House Minority Leader Joseph W. Martin (R):

I don’t know what [House Majority Leader] Sam Rayburn and those are going to try to do when we reorganize but it may be necessary for me to have a talk with you before the convening for the new Congress. If you will be in Washington between now and then for any period of time, I hope you will let me see you. I am going to see [Governor] Byrnes this weekend and discuss the future of our organization in South Carolina. Senators Maybank and Johnston were only able to beat us by a few votes. We had the largest turnout in the history of South Carolina and Eisenhower received almost fifty percent of the votes cast, with every big name in South Carolina against him with the exception of Jim Byrnes and me.37

Rivers also wrote fellow Armed Forces Committee member Congressman Dewey Short (R) of Missouri. Again, Rivers expressed concern at the future actions of Sam Rayburn. He informed Short, “It may be necessary for me to have a conversation with you before Congress is reorganized. I am determined to stay on the Armed Services Committee.” Rivers was not disciplined, and he remained on the Armed Services Committee, but the congressman’s concerns about his ability to straddle the fence between his constituents and his national party lingered long after the new president took office.38

In the months after Eisenhower’s election, little changed in South Carolina, but white anxieties remained high as the Briggs case continued to move slowly through the

37 L. Mendel Rivers to Joseph W. Martin, Jr. (November 6, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
38 L. Mendel Rivers to Dewey Short (November 6, 1952), Rivers Papers, SCHS.
courts. Although many southern leaders expected the United States Supreme Court to rule against state sponsored racial separation, many segregationists hoped that the new president would name more conservative judges to the judiciary and, therefore, slow the process of court ordered desegregation. Others predicted that the more conservative Eisenhower administration would allow for lax enforcement of any judicial order. In any event, many of the state’s segregationist leaders found Eisenhower’s politics more acceptable than his predecessor’s and were comfortable with his record of supporting states’ rights.

This relative calm, however, was mildly disrupted in April 1953 when the NAACP called on the administration to end segregation at Charleston’s navy yard. Clarence Mitchell, the Washington Director of the NAACP, chastised the Department of the Navy for allowing “rigid racial segregation” at the facility. Mitchell pointed out that African Americans were forced to use different restrooms, drink from segregated water fountains, and dine in blacks-only dining halls. Since the navy yard was federal property, Mitchell called on new Secretary of the Navy, Robert B. Anderson, to end the discriminatory policies.39

The Eisenhower Administration and Secretary Anderson were slow to respond to the NAACP demands. Throughout the spring and summer of 1953, the Charleston navy yard remained segregated and the president continued to receive praise from South Carolina segregationists. For example, at the 54th Annual Governors’ Conference, Byrnes declared that southerners would not return to the Democratic Party in presidential elections so long as the party’s platform included calls for granting civil rights to African

39 News and Courier (April 2, 1953) 1.
Americans. Southerners need not worry that their ancestors were “turning over in their graves,” according to Byrnes. “I listened pretty carefully in our state last year,” he claimed, “and no noise was heard from the graveyards.” The South Carolina governor praised Eisenhower for supporting “states’ rights.”

Byrnes’s admiration of Eisenhower did not, however, lead the governor to dismiss the danger that federal civil rights initiatives still posed to the racial caste system. The governor, much like Strom Thurmond in the 1950 Democratic primary, insisted that the only way to limit federal authority was for states to reject federally funded projects. Byrnes declared that all 50 states had made the United States Treasury a “grab bag” for local projects. He contended that the lust for federal money inevitably led to the transfer of control from the states to the national government. “I want to see the governors . . . who go to Washington,” Byrnes proclaimed, “keep their hats on their heads instead of going hat in hand begging for money the people of their state have sent to Washington.”

Byrnes’s call for reduced federal aid was contrary to the wishes of many of his constituents and came during a time when the state was relying more and more on federal defense spending. The Charleston Air Force Base was in the construction phase and other military bases in Charleston, Beaufort, and Columbia were struggling to maintain civilian employment levels equal to their Korean War peak. Likewise, work on the federally funded Santee-Cooper hydroelectric project, which began in the 1930s, was near completion, and federal authorities had also provided most of the funding for the Clarks Hill Dam project.


Despite Byrnes’s foreboding, many whites and blacks jointly praised these large projects and declared them a positive influence on South Carolina. Indeed, it was not the prospect of an expansion of federal patronage or anxiety over Eisenhower’s limited racial initiatives, but his call for greater fiscal responsibility and a reduction in federal expenditures that most worried South Carolinians. The rapid decline of defense industry jobs after World War II had wreaked havoc with state and local coffers. South Carolina’s leaders were determined to avoid a similar economic collapse at the end of the Korean conflict.

It is not difficult to appreciate the intensity of these concerns about the future of federal funding in South Carolina. Even industries and state revenues that were not directly related to national defense had become dependent on Cold War military spending. For example, the South Carolina Cotton Manufacturers Association (SCCMA) “vigorously” protested changes in the way that the Department of Defense contracted textile work. According to one member of the group, the federal government’s decision to “hand out defense orders like WPA jobs,” contributed to the “national debt” by driving up prices and “deprived” South Carolina workers of “countless hours of employment to which they” were “entitled.” In a telegram to Senator Maybank, a representative of the SCCMA warned that, “in many cases,” South Carolina textile mills were already operating “without profits.”

Furthermore, defense appropriations also funneled money into the state’s social welfare programs. Charleston and its surrounding counties were named “critical defense areas,” which made them eligible for large sums of additional federal money. This

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42 Telegram from John K Cauthen to Burnet R. Maybank (February 6, 1952), Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.
money was intended to help limit the local impact of military expansion on public services and amenities. For example, in 1952 alone congress authorized over $600,000 dollars for school construction in North Charleston. According to correspondence between Maybank and Earl J. McGrath of the United States Commission on Education, Charleston County only had to provide a local match of $20,000 in order to secure the funds. Also, the federal Housing and Home Finance Agency allocated $175,000 for construction of new homes in the Charleston area.43

In some cases, defense appropriations completely and permanently altered South Carolina’s infrastructure, its social system, and its economy in a very short time. No such project had a greater impact on post World War II South Carolina than the construction of a nuclear weapons plant in parts of Aiken, Allendale, and Barnwell Counties. The project, which was built under the direction of the Atomic Energy Commission by the DuPont Company, transformed the rural area on South Carolina’s southwestern border into a bustling Cold War suburbia. The federally funded project was the single largest construction project in state history and provided a much needed boost to the state’s economy.44

Aiken, the area’s largest town had a population of only 7,000 in 1950. The largest city in the region was Augusta, across the state line in Georgia, and it boasted a population of only 70,000. In a matter of months the local population was dwarfed by the thousands of new residents required to build and operate the facility. The construction

43 Ivan D. Carson to Burnet R. Maybank (March 3, 1952); Earl J. McGrath to Burnet R. Maybank (February 28, May 27 and March 10, 1952), Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.

crew alone brought almost 40,000 new people to the area and once the facility was operational it employed 4,000 full-time workers. The changes to the local infrastructure and economy were rapid and dramatic. Almost overnight the sleepy southern backwater known for its fertile soil and red clay mud became a federal town. According to historian James Farmer, the impact of the facility on the Aiken area was greater than that of the Civil War. “Sherman’s army was larger,” notes Farmer, “but it did not have families in its train and it only passed through.”

Farmer contends that most South Carolinians were supportive of the plant and were willing to endure the rapid social changes that it brought in exchange for the economic benefits it produced. The facility appealed to the region’s economic need, its staunch anti-communism, and traditional support of the military. However, the plant did come at some cost to local residents. By March 1952 construction had resulted in a government take over of land owned previously by 6,000 mostly rural residents. Landowners were paid below market prices for their property and renters and sharecroppers received no reparations at all. Nonetheless, its positive economic impact was undeniable. The facility’s property and its construction cost $1 billion at a time when all of the real and personal property in the state was valued at a mere $4 billion, Aiken quickly became home to some of the highest paying jobs in the South, and the plant’s employees and their families rapidly transformed the impoverished region into a bastion of middle class homes and white collar consumerism.

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
Despite the plant’s clear economic benefits for many white South Carolinians, some hardcore segregationists remained apprehensive about the potential of federal civil rights initiatives to influence local racial customs. Days after the project was introduced to the public Senator Maybank received correspondence from Thomas L. Hamilton of the “States Rights Association” concerning the new factory. Hamilton asked Maybank to stop an NAACP petition demanding integrated facilities and housing at the plant. Hamilton, who Maybank identified as a member of the Ku Klux Klan, insisted that integration was a “Marxist-Zionist Movement.” It is notable that Hamilton did not suggest abandoning plans for the factory, only that it be a segregated facility.47

Others worried that the rapid changes would undermine the local community and overwhelm its traditional infrastructure. The construction contract called for improvements to the area’s transportation system, but did little to address the project’s impact on local education. The school system was already poor, even by South Carolina standards. Annually, Aiken County spent only $124 for every white student and $61 for every black student compared to the state average of $139 for whites and $77 for African Americans. Like the rest of the state, the county faced the dilemma of improving its schools while maintaining segregated facilities. Aside from the additional income from Governor Byrnes’s sales tax, the region did not receive any new state funding to improve its overcrowded schools or its lack of proper housing until the federal government contributed over $6 million to construct 3,225 rental units and 625 sale units to alleviate the housing shortage, and Congress allotted funds to build new schools. As a

47 Thomas L. Hamilton to Burnet R. Maybank (December 5, 1950), Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.
consequence of such measures the Savannah River region soon became almost entirely dependent on federal funds.48

Though no other region experienced the kind of rapid social and economic changes brought about in the area surrounding Aiken, many other parts of South Carolina also benefited from increased federal investment. For the most part, white South Carolinians welcomed these changes. White workers in South Carolina mentally separated the federal government that provided funding and issued paychecks from the federal government that allowed Justice Department investigations of voting rights cases and promoted a handful of civil rights reforms.

At the same time that the state’s segregationists were lambasting the federal courts for seeking to enforce equal protection statutes, South Carolina was actively seeking more federal involvement in the state’s economy. In many cases, local officials actually requested federal monies to pay for segregated facilities. For example, the Charleston County Council unanimously supported a petition requesting funds from the federal government to build a new hospital for African Americans. Howard J. Sears, the Charleston County Manger, noted that the new hospital was necessary because of the high number of new black residents who had “moved into Charleston and Charleston County because of employment at the Charleston Naval Base and the Airforce (sic) Base.” The Charleston County Development Board concluded that “the impact of defense activities in the Charleston Area” had led to an “acute shortage of general hospital beds.” According to a county report, “The expected influx of construction workers and civilian employees at the Airforce Base, and further expansion of the

Charleston Naval Base,” would lead to a severe shortage of hospital facilities for African American patients. “There are no acceptable general hospital beds,” claimed county officials, “where a Negro patient may be treated by his own Negro physician.” Charleston did not receive funds for a new hospital for African Americans, but the state did receive a federal grant of nearly $6 million for the construction of a medical college in Charleston. The new facility was also awarded a $100,000 grant for cancer research, and applied for an additional $1.1 million from the federal government for additional construction. The federal funds for the new medical school dwarfed the $3.6 million allocated by the state.49

School and hospital construction were indicators of local aspirations to lure federal dollars to the South Carolina, but payroll statistics offer an even better guide to the impact of defense spending on the region. Overall, shipyard workers were the highest paid employees in the area. With less than 10,000 workers, the shipyard’s payroll hovered around $30 million in the early 1950s. The total payroll expended by manufacturers, wholesalers, retail businesses, and the service industry in the Charleston metropolitan area was slightly less than $40 million. Manufacturers employed a similar number of employees for less than $20 million. The total payroll for manufacturers, wholesalers, retail business, and the service industry averaged approximately $1,900 per year per employee while the navy yard workers averaged a yearly salary of almost $3,500.50


50 Ibid.
Although African Americans were limited to less-skilled jobs at the shipyard, the prospects for black workers at the facility were still better than in civilian industries. In August of 1952, the facility employed approximately 2,350 non-white workers. Additionally, the $28 million Charleston Air Force Base under construction in 1952 promised to employ as many as 550 African American workers. In fact, prospects for black workers were so good in Charleston County that between 1940 and 1950 almost 10,000 new non-white residents relocated to the Charleston metro area. County Manager Howard J. Sears argued that this increase was “due to defense activities.” He pointed out that Beaufort, Colleton, Dorchester, Berkeley, and Georgetown Counties all had increases in their African American population of at least five percent in the same 10 year span due to relocations for defense related work. Furthermore, he estimated that more than 1,500 African Americans had moved into Charleston County since the 1950 census. Since most of those workers brought their families with them, local schools witnessed a spike in African American enrollment. The number of black students in Charleston County, for example, increased from 13,708 in 1947 to more than 17,000 in 1952.51

These demographic changes, which took place while the Briggs case was working its way through the court system, amplified both black determination to challenge second class schools and white anxieties about preserving the privileges of whiteness. Nonetheless, military officials spent as much, if not more time, reassuring local leaders that military spending would remain high as they did addressing civil rights issues. For example, in Charleston, Captain T.T. Dantzler assured local business leaders that the shipyard’s “future role is secure.” The shipyard’s commanding officer predicted that,

51 Ibid.
Despite moderate layoffs in 1953, the facility would employ between 7,000 and 8,000 civilian workers throughout the 1950s. His predictions were a marked increase over the roughly 5,000 workers who had been employed at the navy yard in the late 1940s. Dantzler also attempted to assuage fears of desegregation at the shipyard. In response to a rumor that the Navy was planning to order the desegregation of civilian employees in the South, Dantzler assured the Charleston *News and Courier* that the navy yard was “following the policy of separate but equal as in the past.”

Dantzler’s reassurances, however, did little to prolong Eisenhower’s honeymoon with white South Carolina segregationists. Any hopes of supplementing local revenues with federal dollars while maintaining segregated facilities ended when the new president ordered the final desegregation of military installations throughout the region in September 1953. A direct order from Secretary of Defense Anderson led to the elimination of segregated water fountains at the navy yard on September 14, 1953. Just over a month later, the cafeteria was desegregated. Just as Thurmond and Byrnes had warned, federal money had led to the loss of local control over racial customs.

By October 1953, criticism of the president had increased substantially in the South Carolina black belt. The *News and Courier* condemned Eisenhower for appointing Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Charleston daily claimed that “Eisenhower’s desire for compromise has caused him to lose an opportunity to make a substantial change in the complexion” of the court. The paper warned in an editorial that Warren was the Republican who was most closely associated with the “Fair Deal.”

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52 *News and Courier* (August 11, 1953) 16.

53 Hopkins, “From Naval Pauper to Naval Power,” 1-34.
editorial declared that Warren was pro-FEPC, pro-labor, and had advocated socialized medicine. It even hinted that Warren was likely to rule against state sponsored segregation in education in the upcoming Brown v. Board of Education case, which was set to decide five consolidated cases, including South Carolina’s Briggs v. Elliott.54

Like their hometown newspaper, white workers at the naval shipyard took umbrage with the Eisenhower Administration’s supposed interests in civil rights. Following the desegregation of dining facilities at the navy yard, white workers sporadically boycotted the cafeteria over a three-year period. According to the News and Courier, the boycott was the result of an insidious NAACP plot. The paper reported, “as soon as the separation policy was ended at the Navy Yard, a group of 14 or 15 Negroes entered what had been the white dining room. Instead of sitting together, each took a seat at a separate table.” The paper, which considered Charleston the paragon for southern gentility and good manners, condemned the “militant” way in which African American workers responded to the desegregation order. The editors seemed especially appalled at the “impoliteness” of the whole affair. “A group of well-mannered persons,” according to the editorial staff, “would not walk into a downtown restaurant – in Charleston or New York – and disperse among the tables.” The News and Courier affirmed that men “of good manners . . . should recognize the social rights” of others. It warned that poor manners could lead to “violence” and “friction” at the shipyard, and encouraged both whites and blacks to resist “racially mixed tables.”55

54 News and Courier (October 1, 1953) 4A.

55 Ibid., (October 21, 1953) 4A.
In a letter to the editor of the *News and Courier*, Clarence Mitchell chastised the conservative newspaper for giving the impression that the only goal of the NAACP was “integration at meal time.” Instead, Mitchell claimed that the group’s aim was “the complete and final end of all racial segregation.” He called the “ending of segregation at the Navy Yard cafeteria. . . but a small part of a very necessary program in democracy’s war against those forces that would destroy the rights of man.” Few Charleston whites agreed with Mitchell’s assertion that the lunchroom incident was a small part in the worldwide fight for democracy. One letter to the editor insisted that the African American workers acted “like hoodlums.” It called the action “rude,” and declared the efforts to integrate the cafeteria an invasion of privacy.\(^5^6\)

The controversy over the desegregation of the shipyard lunchroom did not deter the base’s military commander from taking further action to comply with the federal desegregation order. Anderson also ordered the desegregation of the yard’s restrooms in January 1954. Unlike the cafeteria, workers could not boycott the restrooms. They did however protest the change. After the order, the base pandered to racist stereotypes about black hygiene and installed sanitary toilet seat covers for the first time. For a short time, white workers took to wearing the seat covers around their necks and dubbed them “Eisenhower collars.”\(^5^7\)

The federal bureaucracy’s new interest in civil rights also impacted South Carolina’s other defense installations, all of which had also undergone token desegregation by 1954. For example, the Department of Defense declared Fort Jackson


\(^5^7\) Hopkins, “From Naval Pauper to Naval Power,” 1-34.
in Columbia “100%” integrated in October of 1953. As on most military bases, black soldiers formed a sizeable portion of the population at Fort Jackson. African Americans represented almost a quarter of the enlisted personnel at the base, which also housed a number of black officers who lived in desegregated housing facilities.58

Of course, the racial arrangements that existed on the base did not extend to off-base areas. Even though the desegregation of Fort Jackson was considered a success by federal authorities, local whites were not so quick to consider it a laudable goal or a welcome outcome. Whenever soldiers ventured off the base, they were subject to local and state laws regarding race relations. In order to comply with local laws, the USO established two clubs in the city. One of the Columbia clubs was for whites and the other for African American soldiers.59

Like the USO clubs, Columbia’s bus system operated under strict segregation rules. African Americans were expected to ride in the back of the bus and leave the front seats for white passengers. On Thanksgiving Day in 1953, roughly 50 black soldiers left the African American USO club on Taylor Street to return to Fort Jackson. It was nearly midnight and the bus had few passengers. After moving toward the back of the already overcrowded bus, two African American soldiers sat in a seat that was also occupied by a young white waitress named Judy Mattox. Mattox protested and the driver of the bus demanded that the two men return to back of the vehicle. The driver, W.G. Brooks, stopped the bus and called on a city policeman to remedy the situation. While the driver


59 Ibid., 344-348.
was off the bus, Mattox claimed that when she tried to leave the bus, one of the men grabbed her by the wrist and asked her sit back down.\textsuperscript{60}

When the officer got on the bus he attempted to arrest one of the servicemen, but was prevented from carrying out the arrest by the other African American passengers. Brooks returned to his car and called for back up. After another police officer arrived, an African American Lieutenant named Austell O. Sherard confronted the officers. Sherard attempted to mediate the situation but was rebuked by the white policemen. When Sherard demanded to know the police officers’ names and badge numbers, they refused to provide the information. Mattox was removed from the bus and all but two of the black servicemen were charged with disorderly conduct and fined $25. One soldier was fined an additional $100 for contempt of court, while Sherard was fined $100 for disorderly conduct and another $100 for interfering with a law enforcement officer.\textsuperscript{61}

James Hinton, the President of the South Carolina NAACP, was outraged at the charges. He helped Sherard hire a defense attorney and publicized the incident. President Eisenhower received complaints from over 50 NAACP branch offices. The charges against Sherard were eventually dropped and the bus controversy died down quickly. Unlike the African American boycott of the segregated bus system in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that same year, or the Montgomery Bus Boycott two years later, Columbia blacks did not seem interested in using the case against the African American officer to initiate a similar city-wide protest. Either they were too unorganized to mount a successful boycott or simply did not view the incident as an offense against the “local”

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 347-350.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 350-353.
black community. The only support that the soldiers received from Columbia’s African American community was legal assistance from the state NAACP, which was headquartered nearby.\textsuperscript{62}

The next day, Columbia whites were reassured that base officials would work with city officers to avoid future incidents involving soldiers stationed at Fort Jackson. The base’s information officer declared, “When military personnel go off the post they become subject to local laws the same as any other citizen.” Nonetheless, white city leaders worried that future white reprisals against black soldiers could spark an increase in local civil rights activism. In the months that followed, the city worked out an agreement with the base that allowed black soldiers who violated city laws to be tried by a military tribunal. Unlike civil and criminal proceedings, a court martial was carried out away from the public eye.\textsuperscript{63}

The bus incident in Columbia was yet another reminder that the desegregation of federal installations could easily disrupt the racial status quo in nearby communities, but it was also a signal that whites could still negotiate with federal officials to slow racial change and maintain local control over the racial caste system. As Olin Johnston and the loyalist wing of the Democratic Party had contended in 1948 and 1950, using white southern political power to forestall desegregation was one of the many tactics available to segregationist whites in their fight to preserve racial segregation. Certainly, negotiation with federal officials had helped to prevent the Columbia bus incident from escalating to a broader protest campaign involving local blacks.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 353-354.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 357-359.
Nevertheless, calls for negotiation and bureaucratic resistance were beginning to lose strength in South Carolina by 1953. The desegregation of the state’s military installations had given credence to the notion that using federal monies to speed the process of “equalization” and, therefore, protect segregation was misguided. Most white South Carolinians supported racial segregation and many had voted for Eisenhower primarily as a means of expressing those views. For local civilian workers, such as those at the Charleston shipyard, the concept of working toward integration conflicted with their personal, political, and social convictions.

Even some of Eisenhower’s most steadfast supporters condemned the Republican president for his limited civil rights agenda. Representative Rivers declared that Eisenhower had given a cold shoulder to the people of South Carolina. He maintained the president had “turned his back on the Republican platform and the Southerners to whom he dedicated his campaign on states rights.” According to Rivers, the Eisenhower Administration had “needlessly bartered the President’s popularity in the South for the pressure group assistance of the big cities in the North.” He also verbally thrashed the president for allowing the Department of Justice to investigate court cases involving school desegregation in Washington D.C. Rivers called the executive branch’s actions “nothing short of arrogant effrontery,” and accused the justice department of “attempting to dictate to the U.S. Supreme Court.”

Eisenhower’s tentative interests in enforcing federal civil rights rules confounded South Carolina’s white segregationists who had hoped that placing a sympathetic president in the White House could avert the enforcement of any potential desegregation.
court verdicts. Before the Supreme Court could even hear the *Briggs* case, many worried South Carolina segregationists had given up on finding an electoral solution for preserving segregation. Indeed, the looming court decision had also left many segregationist parents with little confidence in public education. Whites, especially in Charleston where the *News and Courier* constantly lauded the benefits of private education, pulled their children out of the public school system at an alarming rate. Between 1950 and 1954 the number of white students enrolled in private academies in Charleston increased from just over 2,000 to well over 7,000.65

The uneasiness in Charleston at the end of 1953 was symptomatic of the unease engulfing the entire state. Resourceful whites who had rallied behind a supposedly sympathetic president, initiated efforts to “equalize” the segregated schools, and reluctantly threatened to abandon public education as a last resort to avoid integration were increasingly fearful that their efforts to combat court ordered desegregation were doomed to fail. For many mainstream whites, equalization and voter participation were a means to protect segregation without giving in to the radical politics of hardcore segregationists. However, the effectiveness of desegregation on federal property was perceived as a harbinger of future civil rights enforcement. In the months before the *Brown* decision, it was already apparent to educated observers that this “middle of the road” approach was, at best, a delaying tactic.

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In May 1954, the United States Supreme Court finally handed down its ruling in South Carolina’s *Briggs* case, which was settled as part of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The verdict, which declared that segregated schools were “inherently unequal,” ignited a firestorm of criticism from southern whites. White leaders in South Carolina uniformly condemned the ruling, took every opportunity to undermine the authority of the federal courts, and repeatedly questioned the ability as well as the right of the national government to enforce court ordered desegregation. Governor James F. Byrnes, Senators Burnet R. Maybank and Olin D. Johnston, and the entire state delegation to the United States’ House of Representatives lambasted the decision. Maybank called the ruling a “shameful political move, rather than a judicial decision.” Clarendon County School Superintendent L.B. McCord described the decision as the single worst event to happen to the South in the twentieth century. “We positively will not mix the schools,” he warned. South Carolina Attorney General T.C. Callison went so far as to refuse to acknowledge that the Supreme Court even had jurisdiction in the matter. “It is my opinion,” claimed Callison, “that no action be taken by this office which would indicate that we consider the State of South Carolina, as such, a party to the controversy. The
ending action is purely a local matter so far as the parties to the suit [the Briggs case] are concerned.”¹

The near uniformity of these responses was significant, indicating that in South Carolina white solidarity was as important as white supremacy. From the beginnings of the Briggs case white South Carolinians had preached the importance of a united front against any challenge to segregated education. But following the Brown decision white resolve reached new heights as segregationists from the state’s various political factions expressed their determination to evade enforcement of the desegregation order. This hardening of white public opinion prompted Southern School News to report that “The solidarity of official opinion was the most significant aspect” of South Carolina’s early response to the Brown.²

Nonetheless, this superficial unity concealed deep divisions within the white communities over the best course of action. Indeed, whites in South Carolina were united in their fervor to protect de jure segregation, but demographic differences and economic divergence between the rural black belt counties, the upstate region, and the three major metropolitan areas made statewide agreement on the most effective and appropriate method to preserve Jim Crow difficult. These tensions and the manner in which white segregationists worked to overcome, or if that failed, camouflage them is the focus of this chapter.


² Southern School News (September 3, 1954) 12.
The early reaction to the *Brown* decision produced few specific plans for defending segregated education from vigorous federal enforcement of the verdict. Unsure of the degree of white anger, South Carolina’s political elites offered little more than vague threats and exaggerated indignation. Elected officials spoke on the “illegality” of the court’s verdict and promised to find a legal way to circumvent it. White leaders urged calm and asked the state’s population to assist public officials in the maintenance of law and order. Of course, they also preached that “law and order” depended on the continuation of racial segregation. White organizations rewarded these unrealistic but popular proposals with a ringing endorsement of the state legislature. For example, the Loris chapter of the South Carolina Farm Bureau voted unanimously to support the General Assembly “in anything they see fit to do” to preserve segregated education.3

In hindsight, whites should have been more prepared for the *Brown* decision. Governor Byrnes may have declared that he was “shocked” by the verdict, but political officers, legal experts, and other informed whites had generally expected the Supreme Court to declare segregated education unconstitutional. The elimination of admission restrictions in higher education (especially in *Sweatt v. Painter* and *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education*) set legal precedents for future court rulings and the state’s newspapers did not seem surprised by the verdict. The *Columbia Record*, for instance, acknowledged that the *Brown* decision was consistent with the series of court decisions from the previous decade that had gradually eroded the legal

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tenets of *de jure* segregation and the Charleston *News and Courier* had predicted a wave of pro-integration court verdicts as early as the mid-1940s.⁴

Nonetheless, up until 1954 the threat of court ordered desegregation of primary and secondary schools was an abstract fear. Once the court ruled that segregated education was “inherently unequal,” southern leaders understood that a showdown with federal authority was approaching. However, neither the intensity nor the specific terrain of that confrontation was predictable. In 1952 South Carolina whites had overwhelmingly supported the notion of abandoning the public school system if necessary to avoid desegregation. Once the *Brown* decision made the enactment of that plan a real possibility, more serious disagreements over the merits of school closure began to surface. For example, State Representative Ernest F. Hollings called the idea of closing the public schools “foolish.” When rural whites and the conservative newspaper editors at the Charleston *News and Courier* championed the idea of replacing the schools with a private education system, Hollings pointed out that the courts might also abolish any such private system by declaring it an unconstitutional attempt to “circumvent the decree.”⁵

The state’s white leaders may have promoted the idea that a unified white response was necessary to prevent or delay court ordered desegregation, but, as Hollings

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⁴ Quint, *Profile in Black and White*, 93-97. *Independent* (May 26, 1954) 4, (July 25, 1954) 4. *News and Courier* (August 9, 1954) 4. Tony Badger has pointed out that few Southern politicians were really “shocked” at the Supreme Court’s ruling. He argues that most southerners were simply resigned to notion that the courts would rule against segregation. Farley Smith, a future leader in the Citizens’ Council movement in South Carolina, frequently complained about the “apathy” of South Carolina whites regarding the desegregation order. Unlike Smith, most whites preached resistance, according to Badger, in hopes of delaying desegregation for years or even decades, see: Tony Badger, “Fatalism not Gradualism,” in eds. Brian Ward and Tony Badger, *The Making of Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 1995) 67-95. For an example of Smith’s comments, see: *News and Courier* (May 26, 1955) 14A.

⁵ *Columbia Record* (May 18, 1954) 4A. The *News and Courier’s* position on private schooling is discussed in the previous chapters.
demonstrated, white unity was superficial at best. White South Carolinians were actually divided into four distinct, if not wholly discreet, factions. The first and most vocal were hardcore segregationists who were willing to abandon the public school system, utilize violent intimidation of civil rights activists, and force a showdown with the federal government if necessary to maintain the racial status quo. The second group was made up of more moderate whites who were willing to accept minimal compliance, if it meant that the basic structure of the racial hierarchy remained in place. The third, smallest, and least influential group was made up of white racial liberals who supported desegregation, albeit with different opinions as to a timetable. Most white South Carolinians, however, belonged to an ill-defined fourth group that tended to operate between the hardcore and moderate group. As the state’s largest white faction, these mainstream segregationists were willing to accept a modicum of overt intimidation and maybe even a little violence, but preferred the use of bureaucratic and legalistic devices to thwart court ordered desegregation. Members of this group ranged from very active to very apathetic and, like white moderates, were only willing to tolerate a small amount of social and economic unrest in their fight to safeguard Jim Crow.6

From 1948 to 1954 South Carolina’s loose coalition of these segregationist factions was held together by a strategy that prepared paradoxically for both an uncompromising approach to court ordered desegregation and a more flexible and legalistic alternative that downplayed the most overt forms of white resistance. State leaders indulged each group

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by promising to uphold the rule of law and prevent public unrest while simultaneously pledging to avoid any desegregation – especially of the public schools. Indeed, the only real consensus among South Carolina whites was that segregation was preferable to desegregation. In the face of such a complex political dynamic, most of the state’s elected officials chose rhetorical posturing over policy making even though they recognized that the specter of a federal desegregation order would ultimately force a showdown between the partisans of each approach. In the meantime, white politicians simply promised the continuation of public order, economic improvement, and racial segregation.

South Carolina’s hardcore rhetoric concealed, for a short time, the difficult decisions facing the state. But, in May 1954, journalist William D. Workman summarized what he saw as the state’s few real options: it could simply accept the court’s verdict and implement a desegregation plan, it could eliminate the public education system entirely and replace it with a private system, or it could resurrect John C. Calhoun’s doctrine of interposition and nullification and declare the ruling itself unconstitutional and refuse to enforce it; or it could simply ignore the order and prepare for a legal process that could take years, or even decades, to resolve.7

In the immediate aftermath of the original Brown ruling, few South Carolinians, save for a small number of right-wing newspaper editors and rural Klan sympathizers, wanted to raise the ire of federal authorities by reviving Calhoun’s treatise on nullification. White South Carolinians recognized that the threat of interposition and nullification would, at best, only postpone federal intervention and not overrule the

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Supreme Court’s decision. Hardcore segregationists, such as First District Congressman L. Mendel Rivers pandered to the state’s most outspoken critics of black activism and backed efforts to renew the nullification controversy, but even he understood that such hardcore rhetoric was unlikely to provide any real solutions if the federal government chose to demand enforcement of *Brown*. For many South Carolinians, especially white workers in the upstate region, such a showdown with federal authorities was clearly not in the best interests of the state.\(^8\)

Even in the rural black belt areas which tended to support the hardcore approach, white groups feared alienating their more moderate neighbors and refused to jump headlong into the most militant forms of white resistance. The South Carolina Farm Bureau’s board of directors encouraged its members to protest forced desegregation peaceably and to “avoid the hysteria and turmoil of shotgun thinking.” The president of the organization, E. Hugh Agnew, reasoned that South Carolina whites should “shift the emphasis from defeatism and resistance to one of hope for an improved educational base providing equal and better schooling while retaining the maximum amount of separation possible.” Of course, Agnew and likeminded whites understood that this, too, was a form of resistance and remained steadfast in their determination to avoid any real desegregation for the foreseeable future.\(^9\)

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Agnew later told a Charleston audience that the state “must admit that we can no longer prevent mixed schools for those who want mixed schools but those who wish to attend separate schools should not be denied the right to do so.” He argued that “the farm people of South Carolina, both white and colored, are bitterly opposed to such a program as the Supreme Court outlines.” According to Agnew, forced desegregation would lead to chaos and jeopardize the social, economic, and political stability of the state. He outlined the feelings of most white South Carolinians when he insisted, “They want neither abolition of public schools nor do they want a shotgun solution, but if worst must come they are ready for either or both.” Agnew, like most white South Carolinians, recognized that, in the absence of an implementation order, the state still had some options. In 1954 the only choice that was absolutely unacceptable to the vast majority of the state’s white communities was meaningful compliance with the Brown verdict.\(^{10}\)

At its annual convention in November 1954, the South Carolina Farm Bureau Federation adopted a resolution in which its members pledged to give their “best efforts and full support in the development of any plan of operation designed to improve our public school system and to avoid such chaotic deterrents to that end as would result from forced integration.” The organization, which represented between 15,000-20,000 members, also declared that “the segregated school system” was the “best and most natural arrangement for the public school system.”\(^ {11}\)

Like the members of the South Carolina Farm Bureau, private businesses were also disinclined to promote the most extreme resistance tactics. Though less militant than

\(^{10}\) Ibid., (January 6, 1955) 14.

\(^{11}\) Ibid., (December 1, 1954) 13.
their rural neighbors, white business interests endorsed legislative measures for circumventing court ordered desegregation, but, due to economic concerns, were skeptical of calls to abandon public education. Likewise, the South Carolina Senate Committee on Education insisted that the state remain mindful of the “close inter-relationship between public education and economic, social and spiritual process” in South Carolina. A legislative report from September 1954 pointed out that there was still a “public demand for an adequate system of public education.”

Since the majority of the state’s white population favored the continuation of free public schooling, it was, as Workman called it, the option of “noncompliance” that created the largest consensus in white communities. The state’s segregationists were well aware that they could not simply ignore the Brown order forever. However, rather than expose the deep divisions in South Carolina’s white communities, political leaders chose to encourage the notion that the state could preserve the public school system and keep it completely segregated for the foreseeable future. Many of the state’s political elites later told historian John Sproat that they privately realized that the state would have to comply with the Brown verdict at some point, but also recognized that their political careers depended on a firm commitment to preserving the maximum amount of segregation rather than promoting meaningful compliance with the law. Likewise, members of the General Assembly sensed that tokenism might be the best way to comply with the decision while still preserving the basic Jim Crow system. Nonetheless, not one single

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12 Ibid., (September 3, 1954) 12.
elected official chose to share the opinion that eventual compliance was inevitable with their constituents.  

While the fiery rhetoric of state demagogues drew most of the attention of the press and placated the state’s angry white citizenry, South Carolina’s white leadership initially adopted a policy that is best described as managed noncompliance. In the short term, the state and local governments took almost no official action to negate Brown. In the long term, they began to prepare quietly for a strategic accommodation of the court order that minimized desegregation and maintained as much of the racial caste system as possible. The state’s only official response to the verdict was a moratorium on the construction of new segregated schools.  

Formal responsibility for placating segregationist whites, maintaining the rule of law, and combating court ordered desegregation fell on the South Carolina School Commission, headed by State Senator Marion Gressette. The Gressette Committee, as the group was popularly known, issued a report to the legislature calling for the state to continue operation of its dual school system in the 1954-1955 academic year. It insisted that, since the Supreme Court had not addressed enforcement of the Brown ruling,

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segregation in public education could continue indefinitely in South Carolina.

Furthermore, the committee called on the governor to resume new school construction. The Gressette Committee concluded that, if the state halted improvement in black education, it would only serve as incentive for African Americans to demand the immediate desegregation of the state’s schools. David W. Robinson, the commission’s lead attorney, informed Governor Byrnes that, if the state withheld funds from an African American school, the local board of trustees would have no choice but to desegregate the county’s school system. By August of 1954, the state sales tax was once again funding the construction of segregated school buildings.\textsuperscript{15}

The resumption of school construction and the recommencement of segregated classes in the fall of 1954 was more than a return to the status quo. During the summer of 1954, state lawmakers began to devise a strategy for apparent “compliance” with the \textit{Brown} ruling without actually desegregating the state’s school systems. Robinson concluded that South Carolina could prevent integrated schools by adopting a complicated pupil placement law. He argued that the state should place all enrollment practices under the direction of local boards of trustees and that pupil placement should be decided on a case by case basis. Thus, any African American parent who wished to send his or her child to an all white school would have to petition the local officials individually a year in advance. Since the proceedings would involve the state’s judicial system, Robinson also reasoned that only attorneys residing in the state of South Carolina should be allowed to take on such cases. He concluded that the convoluted bureaucratic procedures and the knowledge that white local officials would rule in each case would

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}
discourage black parents from seeking a transfer of their children. Even if an African American did manage to hire a lawyer, navigate the complicated bureaucracy, and petition for school reassignment, the board could always reject the transfer on academic grounds.  

Like its lead attorney, the Gressette Committee was also determined to alter state laws and school regulations in preparation for approaching legal battles. In its first post-
Brown report, the Commission noted that the protection of segregated education depended on clear planning and not fiery rhetoric. “In the pursuit of these ends,” the report stated, “your committee has moved with caution and with a minimum of publicity to avoid hasty action and public misunderstanding, which could cause inflammation and friction.”

This bureaucratic approach to forestalling desegregation and slowing potential legal challenges received a significant amount of support in the General Assembly. State Representative Hollings, who was a candidate for Lieutenant Governor in 1954, agreed that basing student placement on residential patterns and academic “aptitude” was a sound strategy for preserving Jim Crow as long as possible. He argued that since many of the newly consolidated school districts had been gerrymandered based on the race of their residents, it would be easy for many counties to simply group all, or most, of the black students together based on their home address. According to Hollings, in cases where residence could not limit desegregation, school administrators could claim that pupil placement was based on academic ability. Just as many educated African

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17 Southern School News (September 3, 1954) 12.
Americans were denied the vote through selective enforcement of literacy tests, black students could be denied opportunity through the selective enforcement of “academic standards.”

Robinson agreed. He claimed that “there are few Negroes educationally qualified to go to schools with similarly aged white children,” adding that scholastically gifted African Americans would “not wish to go to a school with a large number of white children.” Even if some black parents did insist on isolating their children in an all white school, insisting that those students could “be legitimately disqualified by the Board of Trustees.”

Although diehard segregationists were sure to condemn any plan that allowed even the slightest integration, the notion of token desegregation as a tool of resistance gained some support in the state’s urban centers, especially in the majority white upstate region. The Columbia Record concluded that, if the General Assembly removed any mention of segregation in education from the state constitution and based pupil placement on academic ability, only a miniscule number of African American students could meet those standards. A group of white teachers polled by the Charleston News and Courier seemed to re-enforce this perception. “Mix Negroes and whites,” said one teacher, “and they are at a disadvantage intellectually and never able to rise to their capacity.” Another educator argued that the state’s school system would become overcrowded with “16, 17,
18, and 19 year-old Negroes in our six and seventh grades” because African American students would fail to perform at the same level as whites.\textsuperscript{20}

South Carolina segregationists understood that testing and bureaucratic resistance could be a powerful force in preserving the basic framework of segregation following a federal court order. After all, South Carolina had successfully maintained a system of unequal teacher pay, even though the federal courts had ordered the state to “equalize” teacher salaries, and it had done so without the support of South Carolina’s most hardcore segregationists. In his investigation of South Carolina’s response to the teacher salary “equalization” process, education historian R. Scott Baker discovered that, following the court order to pay black teachers the same wages as white educators, the South Carolina legislature made changes in teacher licensing and school administration that ensured white teachers a higher salary than black ones. The state, claims Baker, used National Teacher Exam scores and employee evaluations to deny equal pay to African Americans. Although black teachers were paid better than before, their pay was never truly equalized. Though the most diehard segregationists were appalled that a few black teachers received raises, the majority of the white population was willing to accept these changes in order to avoid further judicial scrutiny. In the process, state leaders learned that cleverly

formulated minimal compliance could both satisfy the courts and avoid rectifying the most obvious inequalities between blacks and whites.21

Nonetheless, segregation through bureaucratic pupil placement hearings was a more difficult problem than preserving racial differentials in teacher salaries. It was easier to manipulate the smaller number of teachers who all taught in single race schools than it was to comply in even the most token manner with the Brown ruling. Even minimal desegregation would have had a dramatic effect on the state’s educational system, especially in rural districts with a black majority. In 1954, more than 42 percent of the 524,000 students enrolled in South Carolina’s public school system were African American. Only Mississippi had a higher percentage of black pupils in its schools.

Moreover, the vast majority of the 295,000 African American students lived in rural counties where residential segregation was not an effective way to ensure mostly segregated schools. In Manning in Clarendon County, for example, there were nearly 3,000 black students compared to less than 300 whites. Therefore, if only 10 percent of the 3000 African American students in Manning were able to “integrate” the all-white schools, the racial make-up of the previously all-white schools would be nearly even. In

other words, even token school desegregation would have had a direct effect on nearly every white child in the majority or near-majority black counties.\textsuperscript{22}

These demographic differences concerned militant segregationists who worried that whites in South Carolina’s urban and suburban areas would undermine the hardcore position. Of the three major metropolitan areas in the state (Greenville-Spartanburg, Columbia, and Charleston), only Charleston had a significant black population. Charleston County was more than 40 percent African American, but its black population was highly concentrated in the city and the rural outskirts while the post-World War II suburbs were largely white. The Columbia area had a large number of black residents, but the white population in Richland County was double the size of the African American population and residential segregation was firmly in place in Columbia by the end of the 1950s. Therefore, many rural whites worried that their urban counterparts would subvert massive resistance and rely on bureaucratic measures that simply were not effective in majority black counties.\textsuperscript{23}

Partially due to these demographic concerns, the success of bureaucratic resistance in limiting black voting and maintaining the white economic advantage did not convince the state’s most devout segregationists to leave the protection of segregated education in the hands of testing administrators. Since malaportionment favored the less developed counties, the rural voice was disproportionately represented in the statehouse. South Carolina’s black belt had voted overwhelmingly in favor of the 1952 school amendment,

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\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.} Report on the Census of 1950, Maybank Senatorial Papers, Special Collections.
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had traditionally fostered the least amount of interracial cooperation, and had been more prone to violent racial oppression. By the end of 1954, rural white segregationists began to lend increasing support to abandoning the public education system entirely and began to apply more pressure on state legislators to resist the call for even minimal compliance.\(^{24}\)

Segregationist political leaders were sharply aware of these trends and adapted their political strategies to take advantage of white anxiety. During his campaign for governor in 1954, Lieutenant Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr., a Batesburg native who had built his political career as a spokesman for rural causes, blasted the idea of allowing even the most qualified black student to enter a white school. “If you let one child come in,” he insisted, “you’ve opened the door.” Timmerman maintained that the state could not compromise on the issue of segregation. “You can’t compromise right with wrong,” he said. Officials in Clarendon, Orangeburg, Colleton, and other majority black counties agreed with Timmerman’s assessment and frequently rejected the idea of even minimal desegregation.\(^{25}\)

The vigor with which rural whites in South Carolina defended white privilege and segregated education concealed a serious problem for government officials and school administrators. Rural school districts were burdened with the fact that they could barely afford South Carolina’s dual school system even in its unequal incarnation. Byrnes’s

\(^{24}\) Bryant Simon, “The Devaluation of the Vote: Legislative Apportionment and Inequality in South Carolina, 1890-1962,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (July 1996), 227-245; reprinted, *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (July 2000) 234-252. In *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South (Politics and Society in Twentieth Century America)*, Matthew Lassiter argues that the unequal electoral districts in the South actually gave ardent segregationists an advantage in the political fight over segregation even though they were actually a minority in the region.

\(^{25}\) *Anderson Independent* (July 29, 1955) 1.
sales tax plan had aided the maintenance of segregated schools across the state, but it did not cover the entire cost of the equalization program. The already struggling rural school systems were also aware that if their suburban and urban counterparts succumbed to token desegregation, they would have no choice but to follow suit, mount a difficult and costly legal battle, or tackle the expense of establishing private schools for white students. The South Carolina Association of School Administrators (SCASA) noted that, despite the implementation of the three-cent sales tax, the state was having serious difficulty paying for its schools. The per-pupil cost to educate South Carolina’s students increased by 133 percent between 1944 and 1953. During that same time period, average incomes only increased by 63 percent. The problem, according to a SCASA report, was even more pronounced in the state’s black belt, which experienced a more significant increase in costs and a smaller increase in salaries than the rest of the state. In fact, by the summer of 1956 Orangeburg County could no longer afford to pay for its segregated school system and was forced to request a higher debt limit from the General Assembly.  

Another problem for school administrators was that South Carolina’s white citizenry refused to acknowledge the difficulty the state had in paying for its dual school system. Meanwhile, elected and civic leaders addressed the issue with unrealistic proposals designed primarily to increase their popularity with the white electorate rather than address the financial needs of the state.

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than offer viable plans of action. For instance, Hugh Agnew of the Farm Bureau declared:

Since South Carolina owns its public school system and pays the costs of operation, it is the right and the responsibility of our General Assembly to say how public schools shall be operated. If the federal government has a right to say how the South Carolina public schools shall be operated, then the federal government has the right and responsibility to pay the bill.

Aside from calling for federal monies, state leaders also promised money that the South Carolina government simply did not have. State Representative Burnet R. Maybank, Jr., for example, called on the General Assembly to allow South Carolina residents a tax grant equal to 30 percent of the total cost of private school tuition as long as the school was located in South Carolina. He also proposed that the grant be increased to 100 percent if the public schools were desegregated.27

Faced with a mounting financial crisis, the fear of school closure, and the hardening of rhetoric from political leaders such as Timmerman, the South Carolina Federation of Women’s Clubs, the South Carolina Education Association (SCEA), the Association of School Administrators, and the School Boards Association all expressed their support for public education and rejected idea of replacing it with a private system. By the end of 1955, each of these urban-based middle class organizations, which were made up of white educators, administrators, and parents, had pledged to keep the public schools funded and open. In doing so, they essentially rejected the rural modes of resistance, but failed to present an alternative plan for preserving segregated education. For example, The SCEA, which represented approximately 10,000 white teachers, issued a statement in the fall of 1954 that called for an “adequate system of free public schools,” local control

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of school administration, continuation of the equalization program, and the continuation of segregated education. The organization declared, “The present pattern of public education in South Carolina is the best form of organization for meeting the needs of children of both races.”

Other education groups and teaching professionals also declared their support for public schools or, at the very least, downplayed the threat to free public schooling in South Carolina. For instance, Richard Breeland, a Columbia teacher who served in the General Assembly, warned that the state legislature had “walked backward for 25 years,” in its school policy. Likewise, the Parent-Teacher Association in Columbia and the Superintendent of Schools in the city of Charleston endorsed the public school system, but, like both Hollis and Breeland, also insisted that state and local officials find a way to maintain segregated education. Indeed, even though no white educational organization or parents’ groups would publicly support the notion that the state’s schools should remain open even if the federal government did force desegregation, a sizable number of white education professionals and suburban middle class white parents certainly made open schools a priority for the near future.

Although the call for open schools resonated with a large portion of the white population, it paled in comparison to the calls to preserve the dual school system. The central weakness of the open schools movement in South Carolina was its unwillingness to address the issue of compliance. It was clear in 1954 that, at some point, the federal


courts were going to demand observance of the *Brown* verdict and that school boards were going to have to at least appear as if they were desegregating their schools. The inability of the SCEA, the local PTAs, and other open school advocates to promote a plan for compliance rendered the organizations impotent in the public debate over segregation. The constant reassurances from white professional groups that they supported segregation only strengthened the impression of white solidarity and made it more difficult for dissenting viewpoints, however limited they may have been, to emerge.³⁰

Fear of rebuke from hardcore segregationists was a potent obstacle, but the formation of a moderate coalition in 1954 was also hampered by the lack of an implementation order from the Supreme Court. Open school advocates were not forced to answer the single most difficult question facing mainstream South Carolina segregationists: should the state maintain a free system of public schools, even if the federal government demanded immediate compliance with the *Brown* decision? Had there been such an implementation ruling in place, the debate would have broadened, and the question of whether, how, and to what extent to comply would have been more pressing. In 1954, the moderate white position was to maintain the status quo. Thus, a coalition between more moderate whites and African Americans did not develop. Many African American leaders were willing to accept tokenism and a gradual desegregation, at least in the short term, but few civil rights advocates wanted the state to simply ignore the *Brown* order completely.

³⁰Morton Sosna argues in *In Search of the Silent South: Southern Liberals and the Race Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977) that by refusing to argue for desegregation, moderate whites effectively ceded the issue to more hardcore segregationists.
South Carolina’s black activists rarely advocated the immediate implementation of the Brown decree. Amidst the rhetorical firestorm surrounding the case, South Carolina’s African American leadership responded conservatively. Several studies of NAACP activism in South Carolina point out that the state’s largest black organization was more inclined to call for calm conflict resolution than immediate desegregation. Some of the organization’s officers, such as Charleston NAACP President Arthur Clement, preferred to form interracial councils that could develop a plan for gradual desegregation of public education. South Carolina NAACP president, James Hinton, declared that African Americans would “welcome the appointment of a committee composed of leaders of both races to sit down and work out plans for the best interests of all the citizens of South Carolina.”

The key problem for African American leaders was that black South Carolinians were also divided over how best to respond to the Brown decision. African Americans certainly supported the Supreme Court’s ruling, but did not agree on how it should best be implemented. Even though the Clarendon school case was the one that Thurgood Marshall of the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund personally argued before the court in the late 1940s and early 1950s, most of the state’s civil rights activists had focused their attention on the issue of voting rights and not school integration. The efforts to coordinate the Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) in South Carolina were at the forefront of civil rights activism in the 1940s. At the beginning of the new decade,

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African Americans in Charleston and Columbia were some of the most politically active civil rights leaders in the South. The PDP faction within the state NAACP felt that if blacks could vote in significant numbers, they could use their electoral might to tear down segregated society and replace it with a more egalitarian system. Arthur Clement even predicted that the harsh rhetoric of white politicians would give way to compliance with the desegregation order. “No one,” he claimed, “likes to be identified as being a ‘gradualist’ but we who are realists have got to understand that” the custom of segregation could not be erased overnight. Clement believed that the best equalizing force was the power of black ballots. Moreover, black leaders, such as Modjeska Simkins felt that the voting rights issue was politically and bureaucratically less complicated than school integration.32

Some African Americans, especially those in rural areas where white oppression was more acute and blacks were less organized, argued that pressuring whites to desegregate the public school system would do more harm than good for black Carolinians. Lewis L. Butler, the principal of the “Ehrhardt Negro School,” sent a letter to the Bamberg Herald to express his concern over Brown’s impact on race relations. Butler, who also operated a barber shop that catered to white clients, argued that “with a few exceptions,” African Americans were “satisfied” with segregated schools. He warned that the Supreme Court had placed black students and teachers in “a most peculiar situation which will be beset with many perplexing problems and grave

consequences.” According to Butler, the “Negro children’s educational opportunities will suffer for the next 50 years,” as a result of the Brown decision. In North Augusta, 30 African Americans circulated a petition supporting segregated education. “There is a very, very good feeling as of now between the races which the Negro parents do not want destroyed,” explained Leon Pendarvis, the group’s spokesperson.33

Other rural African Americans, however, did voice their displeasure with the white reaction to the desegregation case, and there was a growing sentiment among many South Carolina blacks that a more forceful response to white obstructionism was needed. The Clarendon County Civic League declared that segregation was “unchristian, undemocratic, unscientific, and asinine,” and James Hinton promised that local groups would begin challenging the legality of continued segregated education. However, the NAACP president also promised not to take any direct action until after the Supreme Court issued its implementation order.34

In 1954 and early 1955 the different responses to the Brown ruling among South Carolina’s African American population exacerbated the divisions within the black community. For example, some members of the Charleston County NAACP began to question Arthur Clement’s leadership. Although he had helped to organize multiple campaigns and participated in countless voting drives, Clement’s cautious approach to “non-political” protests led to dwindling support for his presidency, especially among the

33 Southern Schools News (September 3, 1954) 12.
34 Ibid.
black working class. By the end of 1954, Clement’s popularity in African American households was limited and local NAACP membership was stagnating.\footnote{Southern School News (September 3, 1954) 12. O’Neill, “From the Shadow of Slavery,” 124-127.}

Clement, like most of the state’s black leaders, initially dismissed the harsh rhetoric of white officials as mere posturing and politicking. This impression began to abate as African Americans realized that the state’s white authorities had no intention of enacting any desegregation plan unless they were forced to do so. Unfortunately, organizational infighting failed to turn this new dissatisfaction into a united black response. Clement resigned from the Charleston NAACP in 1955 and moved out of state; John McCray and Modjeska Simkins engaged in a malicious public feud, and efforts to elect blacks to local offices in Charleston and Columbia failed miserably. The lack of an implementation order, the commitment of whites to segregated education, and the absence of a united black front all contributed the failure to achieve compliance with Brown in 1954.

According to Southern School News, South Carolina’s approach to the desegregation order was “manifested more in words than deeds.” Likewise, African American reactions to those “words” were fragmented and produced no concerted campaign to integrate the schools.\footnote{Southern School News (November 4, 1954) 14. O’Neill, “From the Shadow of Slavery,” 124-127.}

Unlike African Americans, however, whites were at least able to prolong the illusion of widespread unity into 1955. Whites Carolinians united behind a new group of segregationist leaders during the 1954 political season. Indeed, for the most part, the primary and general elections of 1954 were the least competitive in recent memory. In the fall of 1954, the state elected George Bell Timmerman, Jr. as Governor and Ernest F.
Hollings as his Lieutenant Governor. Strom Thurmond also replaced the deceased incumbent, Burnet R. Maybank, as one of state’s United States Senators. Both Hollings and Timmerman had spent the entire campaign reassuring voters that they would find a way to maintain segregation in the South Carolina public school system.

In the Democratic Primary, Timmerman easily dispatched Columbia businessman Lester Bates, taking every opportunity to blast his opponent on the race issue. The Lieutenant Governor called Bates the preferred candidate of the NAACP and warned that if Bates won he would owe a debt to civil rights leaders. Like Hollings, Timmerman also promoted a plan to legally circumvent the *Brown* verdict. He called for the creation of a three-tiered school system. Under his plan, which was similar to “freedom of choice” plans under consideration in North Carolina and Alabama, parents would have the right to send their children to a racially segregated school or an integrated one. Although Bates attempted to criticize the plan because “some” of the schools would be integrated, he failed to provide a school plan of his own. Instead, Bates called for the formation of a statewide committee to study the problem and solve it peacefully. Timmerman simply responded that James Hinton, the President of the South Carolina NAACP, had proposed the same plan, and reiterated his claim that Bates was soft on the race issue. The Lieutenant Governor won the primary with more than 60 percent of the vote and then the general election without seriously addressing a single other issue. It is especially noteworthy that Timmerman never explained how the state would finance the additional school budget during a time when education funding was already stretched thin. Again, the official response to the desegregation threat took place in a netherworld of unrealistic
plans and promises, where white politicians told their constituents what they wanted to hear without facing up publicly to the realities of the situation.37

As was often the case during the post-World War II civil rights movement, African Americans and whites entered 1955 with starkly different expectations. Black leaders expected a gradual end to Jim Crow and most whites expected the status quo to persist for the foreseeable future. African Americans hoped that, once in office, Timmerman’s rhetorical assault on the civil rights movement would give way to a more responsible public debate. For several months after the Brown decision, African Americans had waited patiently for white officials to announce a realistic desegregation plan. Unfortunately, Timmerman embodied black fears of recalcitrant white politics and launched his own campaign of uncompromising resistance to desegregation in South Carolina.

The new governor’s rhetorical onslaught against civil rights activism continued in his inaugural address. He called desegregation a communistic idea and warned that “gradualism” was a “cowardly approach,” and that the idea of slowly removing racial boundaries was “a creeping evil that has no place in the government of free people.” The new governor promised that segregation would remain the law of the land during his tenure and refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the courts in the Brown case.

37 Quint, Profile in Black and White, 128-129. Numan V. Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950’s (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 70-71. Thurmond’s campaign was especially interesting, in that he was elected as a write-in candidate in November to replace the departed Maybank. Although race played a role in the campaign, it was not the central issue. For information on this peculiar election, see: Doyle W. Boggs, “A Different Brand of Education: Strom Thurmond Goes to the Senate, 1954,” Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association (1984) 77-85.
Timmerman even told the South Carolina Education Association that integration was “contrary to the divine order of things.”

With Timmerman setting the tone for resistance, in March 1955 the South Carolina General Assembly repealed the compulsory attendance law. The following month, it passed a law to revoke funding from any school that desegregated and ended the practice of automatically rehiring teachers for the next academic year. The result of these new laws was, as Governor Timmerman put it, to ensure “the people of South Carolina that they will not be forced to send their children to mixed schools,” and to place more power in the hands of local officials. Although these new directives were important statements of white determination, they were also effective in further limiting black activism. The changes in teacher employment rules gave the Boards of Trustees more control over who taught in the state’s classrooms and the threat to revoke funding made certain that whites would blame integration-minded African Americans if their local school closed because of a lack of money.

Nevertheless, even though Timmerman promoted the new pupil placement and school funding laws as evidence that South Carolina whites were united in their defense of racial segregation, cracks in the façade of white solidarity began to show in the spring of 1955. When the Supreme Court’s implementation order in the Brown case was handed down in May, African American calls for an end to segregation in education gained a new source of credibility. For the first time, it became apparent that South Carolina

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whites would have to move beyond rhetoric and a plethora of impractical schemes, and
decide which tools of resistance to employ in the fight to save Jim Crow schooling.
_Brown II_ was the beginning of the end for efforts to threaten militant options, such as
school closure, while simultaneously pursuing various kinds of tokenism and managed
compliance or delay.

In their attempts to minimize the effects of these tensions and conflicting agendas,
state lawmakers explicitly declared that the federal government was acting beyond the
realm of constitutional authority rendering both _Brown_ decisions moot. Although
lawmakers frequently called on South Carolinians to obey the rule of law, they also
implicitly encouraged the notion that, regarding segregation, only state laws need be
observed. For example, in August 1955 Clarendon County officials warned Thurgood
Marshall that local schools would close and black teachers would be fired if the courts
ordered desegregation in the county. Although the threat of closure was perfectly
consistent with South Carolina law, it was a direct violation of the _Brown_ ruling.
Moreover, _Brown II_ unequivocally applied to Clarendon County. Since the Summerton
school district was specifically named in the case, it was directly under court order to
initiate a “prompt and reasonable start toward compliance.”

Although unconstitutional, the actions of Clarendon County did prove effective.
Rather than combat racial separation in education in areas that exhibited the most
resistance, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund initially chose to fight for compliance in the
less hostile border South. Hinton went so far as to promise not to resort to legal action
until every “local effort” had been exhausted. R. Scott Baker concludes that the NAACP

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basically “retreated” from South Carolina rather than challenge the combination of complex legal resistance and local intimidation.41

This NAACP “retreat” combined with misrepresentations of the impact of the Brown decisions to foster white hopes for the continuation of the status quo. Throughout 1954 and early 1955 most white South Carolinians clung to the notion that there was still a legal way to protect segregated education. The near constant assurances from state leaders that South Carolina would find a way of maintaining its dual system was re-enforced by frequent pronouncements from the state’s media outlets that the court had erred. According to Andrew McDowd Secrest, editor and publisher of The Cheraw Chronicle from 1953 to 1968, this perception was largely due to misreporting in the state’s print media. “The leading newspapers of South Carolina,” he wrote, “often misled their readers and encouraged them to support policies that threatened to precipitate a dangerous confrontation between state and federal authority.” Secrest also pointed out that the most of the state’s media justified calls for a composed response to the Supreme Court’s order by promoting the idea that the courts would allow years, if not generations, for full enforcement of the ruling.42

Despite these assurances from state leaders and media outlets that South Carolina’s system of segregated education was safe for the foreseeable future. There were obvious, if widely ignored, warning signs that this would be difficult to ensure. The Federal District Court, for example, barred Clarendon County from denying admission to any

41 Ibid.

“qualified” student from its schools in a July 1955 ruling. The court stopped short, however, of placing an exact timetable on integration and refused to demand that Clarendon officials create a nondiscriminatory set of qualifications for pupil placement. Mainstream segregationists insisted that the vagueness of the court’s ruling meant that discriminatory pupil placement rules would effectively block any real desegregation of the South Carolina public school system.43

The only faction of the white population that argued that Brown II or the federal district court’s ruling was a serious threat to segregated education was the hardcore group. Even though the order stopped short of insisting on immediate or even gradual integration by failing to give an explicit timetable for compliance, some diehard segregationists had grave doubts about the ability of state lawmakers to combat federally mandated integration. Hardcore segregationists called for a more determined mass effort to forestall what they saw as the inevitable enforcement of the Brown rulings. Their desperate and resourceful efforts helped to transform the tenor of white resistance in South Carolina, shifting the balance towards more militant tactics. The passion and dedication of hardcore segregationists ultimately hardened the mood of whites across South Carolina and their fervent resolve to defend de jure segregation effectively silenced an already embattled group of moderate whites.

The increasingly hostile and determined mood of South Carolina’s white population became more apparent during the summer of 1955. Some whites sought out pro-segregation organizations to vent their frustrations with the challenges to white privilege. A meeting of the Ku Klux Klan in Sumter attracted several hundred people,

and a cross was burned in front of an African American recreation center in Anderson. However, the KKK had never enjoyed mainstream support or official sanction in South Carolina. Horry County Sheriff John Henry, for instance, warned Klansmen to stay out of his jurisdiction and even the conservative Charleston *News and Courier* preached against of the dangers of “Ku Kluxism.” Nevertheless, a moderate resurgence of the KKK in South Carolina was an unwelcome sign of intense white outrage and evidence that many whites wanted to organize protests against the threatened changes in the racial status quo. In order to provide a voice for that protest without succumbing to the “distastefulness” of “Ku Kluxism,” whites began to lend their support to more “respectable” outlets for dissent.⁴⁴

Throughout the Low Country individuals who supported mass action against civil rights advocates formed chapters of the States’ Rights League. The largest groups were in Darlington, Charleston, and Florence. For a short time, the League enjoyed an air of respectability that other white supremacy groups lacked. It was able to book prominent southern leaders, such as former Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge, for speaking engagements and succeeded in drawing membership away from other white supremacist organizations. For example, the Florence chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of White People regrouped as the States’ Rights League in March 1955 after national NAAWP leader Bryant Bowles became ensnared in several public controversies.⁴⁵

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⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Bowles was accused of nonpayment of federal income taxes. He was later convicted of the murder of his brother-in-law in 1958 and spent most of his life in the Texas prison system.
Although it never attracted a large number of people, the League was a precursor to later white fringe groups. Initially founded in the late 1940s by supporters of Strom Thurmond’s Dixiecrat campaign, the group experienced a growth spurt after the original Brown decision, and again following the implementation ruling. The organization professed a belief in the “individual liberties guaranteed by the Federal Constitution” and avowed “legal” dissent in the opposition to “socialistic platforms.” The States’ Rights League argued that its “strongest opposition” was to “the Supreme Court, which wrongly abrogated, modified or amended the provisions of the U.S. Constitution.” It had a strong following among white members of the South Carolina Farm Bureau. For example, a meeting of the Sumter group at the county’s Farm Bureau office in September 1954 attracted over 700 people. At an October meeting, Georgia’s Commissioner of Agriculture, Tom Linder spoke to an equally large group at the facility. He charged that the NAACP was not only seeking an end to segregation in education but to segregation “in the church, and then before the marriage alter.” Voicing the fear of miscegenation that underwrote much of the rhetoric of white resisters, Linder concluded that the battle to save segregated schools was a “fight for the very existence of the white man down here in the South.”

At an August 1955 meeting of the Sumter States’ Rights League, Thurmond called on an audience of more than 3000 white South Carolinians to “resist integration by every legal means” and to oppose desegregation “harder than the integrationists fought to end segregation.” According to Thurmond, the Supreme Court’s decision in the Brown case was an illegal usurpation of “the right of Congress to legislate” and was an unlawful

attack on states’ rights. “There are some people who advocate and others who have been led to believe that we should submit to the court without resistance. I reject any such proposal,” declared the former Dixiecrat.47

Like Thurmond, most League members hoped to find a legislative solution in their efforts to save *de jure* segregation. Edward Atkinson, the president of the Sumter chapter of the States’ Rights League, called on southern congressmen to “band together” and fight for “a constitutional amendment or some form of legislation which will eliminate integration.” Atkinson worried that if southerners allowed their “protests to die away, the program for integration will proceed.” His worries were consistent with the fears of other massive resisters throughout the South. According to historian Tony Badger, segregationists rallied so fervently because they thought that gradualists and those who supported compliance might have the upper hand in the segregation debate.48

The League and its supporters may have professed a belief in legal protests, but many of its members were militant segregationists who, should legal methods fail, had no intention of meekly deferring to the federal courts. For example, G.L. Ivey, a restaurant owner and member of the Florence States’ Rights League, had fired all of his African American employees after the first *Brown* decision. Other members of the Florence chapter of the League attempted to force a Baptist minister to resign for preaching to black parishioners. When a member witnessed several African American children drinking from a “whites only” water fountain, the Florence organization condemned the

47 *Southern School News* (September 1955) 6-7.

staff of the Florence County Agricultural Building for failing to monitor the use of the building’s facilities. While the rhetoric continued to stress legal resistance, the actions of many League supporters revealed a willingness to embrace more militant tactics to stymie black advances and racial change.49

The formation of organized, militant resistance to desegregation in South Carolina was a serious concern to the small population of whites actually advocating compliance with the Brown verdict. However, instead of mounting a united campaign against hardcore segregationists, even some liberal whites joined the chorus of their more diehard neighbors and blamed the heightened tensions on the civil rights activists who were pursuing adherence to the desegregation order. For example, Jack O’Dowd, the editor of the Florence Morning News, worried that the pressure to integrate was pushing South Carolina down the road toward militant resistance. O’Dowd, who was one of the few newspapermen in the state to encourage state leaders to face up to the fact that they had lost their battle to maintain the dual school system, worried that some districts were hell-bent on closing the schools rather than desegregating them. He blamed the NAACP and the federal courts for jeopardizing the improvements that had been made in the education of African Americans in the previous five years, but his primary cause for concern was the potential white response to the freedom struggle. Outside agitators, he claimed, would push white South Carolinians into a position that would endanger black progress and prosperity.50


Although there was a small but dedicated group of white liberals who championed black civil rights, the cause of desegregation failed to attract a significant number of whites. When Alice Norwood Spearman took over the state’s branch of the Southern Regional Council, the South Carolina Council on Human Relations, she found it difficult to promote even basic interracial cooperation, let alone support for a more radical racial readjustment. According to historian Pete Daniel, white members of the SCCHR felt that the NAACP was too aggressive. The failure of the Council on Human Relations to support the legal agenda of the NAACP led prominent civil rights leader Modjeska Simkins to resign from the organization and created a schism between African American activists and the SCCHR’s mostly white membership. Between 1954 and 1955, when white support might have been the most valuable, membership in the organization declined. White members blamed the “radical” agenda of the NAACP and African American members blamed the failure of their white colleagues to repudiate segregation in education. Daniel concludes that there was a “near collapse of cooperation between South Carolina’s blacks and whites.”

In August 1955 at the National Governor’s Conference in Chicago, Timmerman urged his fellow southerners to unite behind a third political party. That same month, state Attorney General T.C. Callison declared, “it is going to be impossible, in my opinion, to operate free public schools on a segregated basis without being in conflict with the ruling of the court.” The only option, he claimed, was to “abandon the public schools.” Seemingly in agreement with his attorney general, the governor reiterated his call for political separatism at the Southern Governors’ Conference in October. Although

his remarks were not well received, Timmerman’s rhetoric encouraged South Carolina’s radical fringe to push for a mass and resolute response against any efforts to desegregate southern society.52

Perpetually concerned that they might lose the political advantage to white backsliders on the race issue or that apathy would erode white commitment to resisting the Supreme Court’s desegregation order, hardcore segregationists took every opportunity to discredit the possibility of a moderate solution. For example, after a number of white ministers encouraged their white congregation to refrain from partaking in hateful or hurtful actions toward their black neighbors, they were quickly silenced by their hardcore parishioners. The Governor’s father, George Bell Timmerman, Sr., for instance, orchestrated the resignation of Reverend George Jackson from his position as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Batesburg by convincing the conservative congregation that Jackson was far too liberal to continue ministering at the all-white church. A similar incident occurred in Orangeburg, where conservative worshipers forced the Methodist Church to relocate Reverend John V. Murray for speaking out against segregation.53

With virtually no support for even token compliance amongst whites, African Americans were left with no option but to return to the courts and demand that the state observe the Supreme Court’s desegregation order and instigate a legitimate plan of


action. Beginning in June 1955, various chapters of the NAACP had reorganized and
renewed the black legal activism that had spurred the desegregation order in the first
place. By the end of September, the NAACP had filed desegregation petitions against
school boards in Greenville, Sumter, Richland, Florence, Orangeburg, Beaufort,
Greenville, and Columbia. 54

White South Carolinians condemned this new activism, and, again, blamed the
deteriorating racial climate on the African Americans. No prominent white elected
official argued in favor of answering the petitions with a plan for gradual or even token
desegregation. For hardcore segregationists, the NAACP petitions were simply another
example of why more concerted resistance was necessary. As in 1950 and 1951, when
Clarendon County whites had attempted to quell civil rights activism through
intimidation, white South Carolinians answered the petitions with a determined effort to
coerce African Americans into withdrawing their requests for compliance with Brown.
The names on the school desegregation petition were made public in a not-too-subtle call
for white supremacists to seek out and enact retribution on black agitators. The
Charleston News and Courier encouraged its white readers to “study carefully the list of
names in the newspaper” and also advocated firing black teachers who were members of
the NAACP. “Membership in the NAACP or any similar organization,” it editorialized,

54 A reproduction of the Orangeburg petition is in: Cecil J. Williams, Freedom and Justice: Four Decades
of the Civil Rights Struggle as Seen by a Black Photographer of the Deep South (Mercer University Press,
Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964 (Urbana: University of
1955) 2B. The State (August 26, 1955) 10A. News and Courier (September 2, 1955) 16A, (September 18,
1955) 2A, (September 17, 1960) 1A. William D. Workman, Jr., The Case for the South (New York: The
“should be grounds for dismissal.” Much of this new wave of intimidation was crafted by white supremacy organizations, such as the States’ Rights League. The League worked behind the scenes to ensure that white public officials would cooperate with the effort. For example, the white superintendent of Charleston County’s schools turned over a copy of a desegregation petition to the *News and Courier* after he was pressured to do so by James Hayes, the leader of the local League. The paper printed all 47 names from the city petition.\(^{55}\)

The publicity garnered by releasing the names of the petitioners helped fuel an upsurge in white community activism. After the petitions were filed in Charleston County, 450 whites from the Moultrie District met to draft a resolution opposing “the operation of any school in Moultrie School District No. 6 on a non-segregated basis.” The group also pledged that, although it “would regret to see the absolute closing down of the district schools,” it would support “closing down the schools before any school in the district is permitted to be operated on a non-segregated basis.” A similar meeting in the unincorporated North Charleston area attracted more than 500 whites, and another 175 whites met at the John’s Island Civic Club to discuss the petitions.\(^{56}\)

In August 1955 a group of prominent politicians, businessmen, and journalists joined the battle by forming an unofficial group called the “Committee of 52.” The 52


\(^{56}\) *Southern School News* (September 1955) 6.
founders of the organization, which included several members of the General Assembly, journalist William Workman, College of Charleston President George Grice, and many of the state’s wealthiest business leaders, handed over a signed proclamation to the South Carolina Schools Committee that called on the state legislature to protect “state sovereignty” and segregation in education. According to the document, the committee was intended to “reassure the people of South Carolina that many substantial citizens are standing steadfast against usurpation of the constitutional rights of the state to manage its own affairs.” Within a week, it had received over 7,000 “endorsements” of the resolution and was bombarded with thousands of requests for copies of the document.57

Other noteworthy South Carolina whites took it upon themselves to rebuke civil rights activists. S. Emory Rogers, an attorney who had represented Clarendon County in the Briggs case, wrote a public letter in which he proclaimed:

> We are not engaged in an ordinary law suit in which legal principles will be applied and decisions founded thereon, but rather in a sociological and psychological crusade aimed at destroying our Southern bi-racial culture. We had good and sound law in our favor in the Clarendon case, but this was ignored by the Supreme Court in a legislative decision . . . 58

Rogers argued that South Carolinians should not expect the courts to rule in favor of segregation unless “the Supreme Court can be convinced that psychologically and sociologically its decisions do not represent the will of the people.” According to Rogers, it did not matter if the state created a “tri-school system” as Timmerman had suggested, or abandoned public education altogether. The NAACP, he predicted, would challenge any system that practiced racial separation. Therefore, it was necessary for South

57 *Ibid.*, Resolution of the “Committee of 52,” Workman Papers, M PC. The Workman Papers also contains a significant amount of correspondence that “endorses” the committee’s statement.

58 *Southern School News* (September 1955) 6.
Carolinians to “convince” the federal courts that desegregation was not in the best interests of the state’s children. Implicit in his remarks was the notion that any interracial cooperation would prove to the Supreme Court that desegregation was, indeed, likely to see a sociological and psychological success.\(^{59}\)

At a meeting of the Virginia Bar Association, Thurmond seemed to agree with Rogers’ assessment. “If propaganda and psychological evidence are effective for our opponents,” Thurmond said, “they can be effective for us.” The former Governor also insisted that whites treat African Americans humanely. He urged each of the southern states to engage in a true equalization program “in spite of the temptation” to punish all southern blacks as retaliation for the actions of the NAACP.\(^{60}\)

The events in South Carolina were emblematic of racial episodes throughout the South. Vocal pro-segregation advocates and organized protest groups, such as the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties in Virginia and The Patriots of North Carolina, Inc., emerged in nearly every corner of the region. However, the largest mass resistance groups were the White Citizens’ Councils (WCC). Each of these organizations utilized various forms of coercion, intimidation, and political pressure to ensure the continuation of white privilege, but no organization could match the Councils’ effectiveness.\(^{61}\)

The first Citizens’ Councils were formed in Mississippi immediately after the Brown decision in 1954, but the organization swept across the South after the Supreme

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\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) Southern School News (September 1955) 7.

\(^{61}\) Bartley, The Rise of Massive Resistance, 92-107. The Citizens’ Councils never referred to themselves as “White Citizens’ Councils,” but the nomenclature was widely used by contemporary journalists, activists, and observers – as was the designation “WCC” to refer to the groups.
Court handed down its implementation order. Most of the various WCC chapters eventually formed a loose confederation called the Citizens’ Councils of America, which was based in Mississippi. The CCA distributed Council propaganda, produced a radio program that was disseminated to stations throughout the South, and it arranged for pro-segregation speakers to attend rallies at various locales in the region.62

The Councils provided an important potential outlet and framework for white protests in South Carolina. The wave of Council organization first reached South Carolina in August 1955 in Orangeburg County. Shortly after the filing of a desegregation petition in Orangeburg District #5, the Orangeburg and Elloree Citizens’ Councils were born. The groups claimed they sought to “oppose the use of force by radicals and reactionaries” to compel integration. Within a month nearly every community in Orangeburg County had formed its own Council. There were WCC units in Cope, Eutawville, Holly Hill, North, Norway, and Cordova. For months, whites had held community meetings and demanded that civic leaders find a way to protect segregated education but had not formed an organized system for promoting white resistance. The Councils provided such a system and the CCA’s standing as the premier organization for combating civil rights activism made it an attractive model for South Carolina segregationists.63

The Orangeburg group obtained a state incorporation charter that declared the organization’s purpose:


"To maintain good relations among the members of all races residing in School District No. 5 (City of Orangeburg), Orangeburg County."

"To oppose the use of force by radicals and reactionaries who attempt to disrupt the peace and good relations among the races of this area."

"To make every legal and moral effort to save the segregated public schools."

"To study ways and means for providing an adequate education for children in School District No. 5 if radical agitators force the abandonment of the public schools."

"To acquaint well-meaning but misled public officials from outside South Carolina with the local conditions and attitudes which make integration impossible in said school district, both white and colored, favor continuing segregation in the public schools."

The Orangeburg Councils received strong endorsements from local whites, with much of the support coming from local businesses and community leaders. Atlanta journalist William Gordon claimed that Orangeburg Council members were “elite, church going, club and business-minded folk who also claim to be God-fearing.” Several business owners demonstrated their support by purchasing advertisements in the Orangeburg Times and Democrat. The issue of desegregation quickly dominated the daily life of Orangeburg County’s roughly 70,000 inhabitants. Since more than 60 percent of the county was black, it was a particularly pressing matter for the white minority. On at least one occasion, the Orangeburg Citizens’ Council placed a recruitment advertisement on the front page of the local newspaper. An August 29, 1955 Council meeting attracted over 3,000 local whites. At that meeting, South Carolina State Senator Marshall Williams encouraged “every white man in the area” to join a WCC chapter. The Elloree chapter received the endorsement of the town’s mayor, W.J. Deer. He proclaimed, “We will fight the leaders of the NAACP from ditches to fence

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64 News and Courier (September, 13 1955) 3A.
posts to keep Negroes out of white schools.” Less than a day after the NAACP petition was filed in Elloree, the WCC claimed 225 mostly middle class members. Just over a week later, the group had grown to over 800 members. 65

From Orangeburg, the group quickly spread throughout South Carolina. The first meeting of the Kingstree WCC drew 225 attendees. The second, held a week later, drew over 300, by which time the group claimed a membership of nearly 500. In Bowman, over 100 people met to establish a Council chapter. The organizational meeting of the Winnsboro Citizens’ Council attracted 300 members. In Manning, near where the Briggs case had originated, nearly 300 whites joined the Councils. On September 1, 1955, the Charleston States’ Rights League renamed itself the Charleston Citizens’ Council. League President James Hayes claimed the move was motivated by the WCC’s superior ability to resist civil rights agitation. He argued, “The NAACP is more fearful of the Citizens’ Councils than any other organization opposing their integration campaign.” By July 1, 1956, 55 separate Councils had formed. Most of the groups were based in the Low Country. Charleston County alone boasted over six WCC chapters. Orangeburg County remained the most organized with eight active Councils. 66

The legitimacy of the WCC and its intimidation tactics were bolstered by a strong endorsement from South Carolina’s political elite. In November 1955 Congressman


Rivers spoke at a rally in Hemingway (Williamsburg County) where he denounced the “New Deal, raw deal U.S. Supreme Court.” He declared that the court “was confused, indoctrinated and brainwashed when it handed down its desegregation decision.” The judgment, he proclaimed, was “an insult to the 40,000,000 white southerners.” He insisted, “The mixing of the races is an insult to the intelligence of both the white and Negro races.” According to Rivers, the Supreme Court had “forfeited its self-respect,” and he pledged to “never submit to that illegal decision.” Rivers urged Council members to “act now to save the Constitution from itself.” He praised the WCC for its support.

“When Congress convenes in January,” Rivers announced, “it is going to be pay day so far as the left wingers are concerned. They are going to demand of Eisenhower the things he promised them to get their votes. Southern congressmen face a tremendous fight, but with the support of the Citizens’ Councils, such as yours, backing us, we can fight without fear.”

The Councils also received the approval of South Carolina’s “Committee of 52.” The unofficial committee’s approval augmented the WCC’s air of respectability and acceptance in the country clubs and chambers of commerce throughout the state. The Councils also benefited from the publicity they gained from “Committee of 52” member and prominent reporter William D. Workman, who later endorsed the Citizens’ Councils in his book *The Case for the South*. Some committee members, however, were concerned over the Councils’ connection to violence in Mississippi. College of Charleston President George Grice, for example, wanted the group to encourage “the Citizens’ Councils” to “subscribe to our principles and platform of non-violence, legal

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67 *News and Courier* (November 21, 1955) from the Rivers Papers, SCHS.
means, and relentless pursuit of the NAACP in the press and in the courts.” He described the Committee as an “elder statesman” that could “guide, not join” the WCC. The college president declared that leadership in white resistance to desegregation should come not from Mississippi and the CCA headquarters, but from South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia where less militant whites held power. 

Less than a month after the Charleston WCC formed, Congressman Rivers, Lieutenant Governor Hollings, Governor Marvin S. Griffith of Georgia, and Executive Secretary of the Mississippi WCC W.J. Simmons met at the Charleston County Hall to launch a Council membership drive. By the middle of October, the Charleston group had recruited 271 official members. Over the course of the next year, the number of Councils in South Carolina grew at a rate of one per week. 

That growth was encouraged by a series of front page editorials in the Charleston News and Courier, in which editor Thomas R. Waring called on all white South Carolinians to lend their support to the Citizens’ Councils and engage in mass protest against forced desegregation. Not only could the Councils defend segregated society, Waring claimed, but they could protect the “rank and file Negroes from the wrath of ruffian white people who may resort to violence.” When the City of Charleston WCC opened an office at 161 Calhoun Street in 1956 the News and Courier celebrated:

The News and Courier has supported the Citizens’ Council movement. The people of South Carolina long needed an organization, efficient, temperate, and guided by able men for the purpose of putting across their States Rights views. The

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South Carolina Citizens' Councils have acted responsibly. They are bulwarks of constitutional government.

We hope that many residents of Charleston County will visit the new office. Charleston County needs a strong Citizens Council movement.  

Using his position as editor of the News and Courier as a soapbox, Waring contended that, by finding a lawful means to protect segregation, the organization actually prevented racial turmoil. The editor, unlike fellow Charlestonian George Grice, encouraged South Carolinians to model their councils after the Mississippi groups, which, according to Waring, had a vested interest in maintaining law and order and had no sympathy for the Ku Klux Klan, or any other group that advocated violence. Moreover, he concluded that Council members were valuable contributors of the “chamber of commerce and the Community Chest.” Council membership was good for democracy, in Waring’s view, because its members were “officers of churches” who did “the civic chores in every town worthy of a name.” He quoted a Citizens’ Councils of America pamphlet that stated, “The Citizens’ Council is the modern version of the old-time town meeting called to meet any crisis by expressing the will of the people . . . The Citizens’ Council simply provides the machinery for mobilizing, concerting, and expressing public opinion.”

Despite Waring’s insistence that the WCC promoted democratic rule, the Citizens’ Councils endorsed and promoted the idea that South Carolina could, indeed should, defy the Supreme Court and that black activism was an insidious plot hatched by “outside

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71 News and Courier (September, 15 1955) 1A, (November, 16 1955) 1A, (November, 17 1955) 1A.
agitators,” “radical northerners,” and “foreign led political extremists.” Even though they
couched their calls for defiance with demands that white protesters obey the law, the
spokesmen for the loose confederation of WCC groups also implied that the overt
intimidation of civil rights activists and their supporters was consistent with the
enforcement of state regulations and the protection of southern culture. It was no
coincidence, therefore, that their appearance coincided with an increase in white violence
throughout the state. Indeed, the veneer of respectability concealed widespread
acceptance within the Councils of more radical massive resistance tactics.

Blacks in South Carolina’s rural counties were particularly at risk. White on black
violence was often underreported and, when it was, unsympathetic law enforcement
officials turned a blind eye. One of the first targets of angry segregationists was
Reverend Joseph Delaine. According to the DeLaine family, whites in Lake City blamed
the minister for the Supreme Court’s decision in the Brown case. As a result, DeLaine
and his family faced a barrage of threatening phone calls and overt acts of intimidation.
On September 3, 1955, for instance, the windows at DeLaine’s A.M.E Church were
shattered when five young white men threw rocks at the building. The reverend wrote
down the license number of their car and called the sheriff, who later returned to the
house in the car. He informed DeLaine that it was a dealer car and that no one could
testify as to who had the car during the rock-throwing episode.72

Over the course of the next month a series of escalating actions revealed that
DeLaine and his family were in serious jeopardy. A cross was burned in front of the
DeLaine home, DeLaine’s church was burned to the ground, and he continued to receive

menacing threats. On October 7, 1955 DeLaine received a letter that referenced a lynching that took place in Lake City after President William McKinley nominated an African American postmaster for the small town at the end of the nineteenth century. Like DeLaine’s church, the postmaster’s home was burned to ground. Unfortunately, the man was home at the time and was burned to death during the attack. The letter to DeLaine stated:

We have been notified by the best of authority that you are the one that started the school segregation mess at Manning, S.C. and that you was run out of Manning for your dirty filthy work. Maby (sic) you don’t know Lake City but you are goin (sic) to fin (sic) out real soon. Several hundred of us have had a meeting and pledged ourselves to put you where you belong, if there is such a place. I wander (sic) if ever heard about the negrow (sic) postmaster that was sent to Lake City and notified to leve (sic). He refused. However, he left, but in a coffin. So we have decided to give you 10 days to leave Lake City and if you are not away by then rather than let spread your dirty filthy poison here any longer we have made plans to move you if it takes dynamite. . .

Church officials worried for DeLaine’s safety and offered him a position as a minister in Bermuda. DeLaine refused and returned to a temporary pulpit in Lake City the following Sunday. The next day, October 10, 1955, shots were fired at the DeLaine home. The minister sent his family to a neighbor’s house before seeing a car blocking the driveway. Several more shots were fired from the vehicle and DeLaine returned fire. Fortunately for DeLaine, he was a better shot than his white adversaries. He hit the car and slightly wounded two of its occupants. The reverend claimed that he only returned fire to “mark” the car so that authorities could properly identify it. As the assailants’ car sped off, DeLaine pursued in his own vehicle. As the two cars passed a service station, a

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third car joined the chase. DeLaine, who by this time began to fear for his safety, had to drive through several small towns and along numerous rural roads to evade the vehicle that was following his car. Shortly afterwards, DeLaine fled the state concealed under blankets in the back seat of a friend’s car. The next day, the minister flew to Washington, D.C. before finally arriving in New York City.  

DeLaine’s hasty exit from the state was a prudent move on his part. After the incident, he was charged with assault with a deadly weapon by a Florence Grand Jury and a warrant was issued for his arrest. Rather than return to South Carolina and face certain conviction, DeLaine sought to defend his reputation from beyond the segregated South. He sent a letter to a Charleston newspaper and a radio station that explained his actions:

I feel like my life’s career as a minister has wound up and also like my life is in danger because of the terrorism and my answer with gunfire on Monday night about 12 o’clock. I don’t know the results, but I am glad that I was able to do what the city policemen should have done, that is, mark the car or the men where the gunfire was coming from. With all of the shooting it didn’t disturb the policemen of the town. I waited approximately 45 minutes for the policemen but they did not show up.

This incident affirms the efforts of historians like Timothy Tyson, Cynthia Griggs Fleming, Charles Payne, Akinyele O. Umoja, and Glenn Eskew to complicate our understanding of the uses and prevalence of non violence during the civil rights era by noting the many examples of individual and collective armed self defense among African Americans in the South. While nonviolent direct action would become a prime tactic of

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the freedom struggle, it always co-existed with the willingness of African Americans to protect themselves, their homes, their loved ones, and communities from white terror.\textsuperscript{75}

DeLaine blamed the episode on South Carolina’s institutional racism and the hatred that had been promulgated by white resistance groups. “The Citizen’s Council,” he declared, “has stirred an unnecessary bad feeling against the hapless Negro.” The black minister was convinced that his actions were justified because his predicament was ignored by white officials. “If I was born into the white race,” he wrote, “I would have been an honorable citizen of S.C., but being born a Negro I was forced to what the law enforcement officers could have and should have done.”\textsuperscript{76}

Given the state’s success in imprisoning John McCray just a few years earlier, DeLaine was determined not to stand trial in the Palmetto State. New York refused South Carolina’s extradition request based on the grounds that the civil rights advocate would not face a fair trial in the state. DeLaine told FBI investigators that he was “not trying . . . to dodge justice.” Instead he described his escape to New York as an attempt to “dodge injustice.” Governor Timmerman publicly dropped the matter and declared that South Carolina was better off without the “troublemaker” anyway.\textsuperscript{77}


\textsuperscript{76} Southern School News (November 1955) 11.

Unfortunately for South Carolina’s black citizens, the specter of white terrorism also targeted other prominent civil rights advocates. A month after the DeLaine incident, the minister’s nephew, Billie Fleming also faced violent reprisals for his civil rights advocacy when shots were fired at Fleming’s home by local whites who were angry at his efforts to force desegregation in the Manning school system. Although no one was hurt, it is important to note that the incident happened not long after the WCC appeared and three months after a Ku Klux Klan rally attracted nearly 1,000 people to the Clarendon County town. Moreover, it was yet another example of how state sanctioned resistance groups helped to create a climate in which violence against civil rights activists and their supporters became more commonplace.78

Other forms of intimidation were also apparent throughout the state. In the fall of 1955, Esau Jenkins’s daughter, Ethel, was not rehired for a teaching position on Wadmalaw Island, outside of Charleston. Jenkins, who had spent the previous two years establishing a Highlander Folk school on John’s Island with Septima Clark and other civil rights activists, surmised that his daughter was fired due to his own participation in voter education and literacy training programs. The daughter of J.H. Richburg also had difficulty securing employment as a teacher. During the summer of 1955, Richburg asked that his name be removed from the original Briggs v. Elliott petition in order to help his daughter secure a job. According to Jenkins, this kind of retribution kept many

78 “Intimidation, Reprisals, and Violence. . .”, 26, 3.
African Americans from signing desegregation petitions, away from the Highlander school, and absent from the voting booths.

In one of South Carolina’s most notorious intimidation campaigns the White Citizens’ Councils in Orangeburg County initiated economic reprisals that targeted student activists at South Carolina State College, members of the NAACP, and other civil rights advocates. Shortly after an integration petition was filed in Orangeburg District #5, the Orangeburg Times and Democrat published the names of the petitioners. Almost immediately, the signatories found themselves facing a wave of intimidation from their white employers, creditors, and suppliers. For example, the employer of one of the petitioners asked that the employee withdraw his name and make a public statement rejecting the NAACP cause. When the worker refused, he was immediately fired.

Orangeburg Mayor Robert H. Jennings, who was the president of a local bakery, the Coca-Cola bottling company, and the Orangeburg Ice and Fuel Company, led the way by refusing to sell goods to black merchants who had signed the petition or joined the NAACP. Numerous other African Americans lost their jobs, local banks recalled loans, area retailers refused to sell to black clients, and dairies stopped delivering milk to the homes of signers. Civil rights activist Modjeska Simkins later recalled that the Citizens’


Councils also pressured pharmacies to deny assistance to black customers who had signed the petition.\textsuperscript{81}

John Brunson, of the local NAACP, claimed that a significant amount of preparation went into WCC efforts to intimidate Orangeburg petitioners. In a later interview with WRFG-FM in Atlanta, Brunson remembered:

> All persons who signed the petition were evaluated by the white folks to see what they could do to them as far as economic pressures. Everyone who had credit with the store, the credit was cut off. A person running a business, a small business, they would make no deliveries to them. The persons who worked in the white folks kitchens were either asked to take their names off or be fired. Banks would not let you have any money.\textsuperscript{82}

According to Reverend Matthew McCollom, who had instigated the desegregation petition, even “petitioners who had some personal relationships with whites” were targeted. He alleged that some African Americans were denied basic medical services. McCollom’s own wife was subjected to one of the most common forms of retribution when she was fired from her job as an assistant principal at Bowman Elementary School. Although the family remained in Orangeburg until 1962, she was never re-hired.\textsuperscript{83}

Other evidence supports McCollom’s claim that even prosperous African Americans were also vulnerable to white economic intimidation. A black contractor alleged, “I once had more business than I could handle during the height of the season.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid. Transcript, oral history interview with Modjeska Simkins in Ronald J. Chepesiuk, Ann Y. Evans, and Dr. Thomas S. Morgan (eds.), \textit{Women Leaders in South Carolina: An Oral History} (Rock Hill: Winthrop College Archives and Special Collections, 1984) 66.


\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Panorama News: Orangeburg, South Carolina: A Microcosm of Various attitudes, opinions &Feelings} (c. 1976), South Caroliniana Library [Hereafter cited as \textit{Panorama News, SCL}].
But now, I’m lucky to get three decent jobs a month.” The same contractor pointed out that he had employed as many as 12 full-time workers, but could no longer afford to maintain a large staff. Likewise, an Orangeburg minister who also owned a gas station was denied credit for gasoline products and forced out of business.84

James Sulton, a NAACP officer and black service station owner believed, “The Negroes in Orangeburg overestimated the white man’s integrity when they petitioned the school board.” Sulton, whose establishment catered to both black and white clients, charged that the WCC pressure nearly drove him out of business. He alleged, in an April 1956 interview: “They cut off all my credit. They have tried to squeeze Negroes economically. The man came in and took the ice cream box away from my station. I haven’t had Cokes in the station since July.” Sulton’s claims were bolstered by a NAACP memorandum that warned: “Firms holding franchise from ‘Coca-Cola, Sunbeam Bread – and Paradise Ice Cream, and several other products decided thru [sic] ‘Citizens’ Councils’ not to deliver any products to Negro Merchants, if those merchants signed the petition for Desegregation.”85

Orangeburg police and fire officials were also involved in the intimidation. Police officers recorded the license plate numbers outside of civil rights meetings, and a patrol car followed McCollom’s every move for several months. “When a few cars were parked outside a house,” McCollom remembered, “firemen would burst into the house yelling, ‘Where’s the fire, where’s the fire?’” Combined with Mayor Jennings involvement with the White Citizens’ Councils, such actions suggested a level of official


endorsement for the WCC’s model of massive resistance and served to discourage African Americans from publicly campaigning for black advancement.86

Within a few months, the economic reprisals had begun to take their toll on the black community. Only after the WCC confirmed that an African American had renounced membership in the NAACP or removed his/her name from the desegregation petition did the economic intimidation against the individual and his/her family end. John E. Brunson of the Orangeburg NAACP recalled, “During that period [African American] people were afraid of the NAACP.” To make matters worse, more than half of the original 57 petition signers had removed their names from the desegregation request.87

White efforts to counteract the spate of desegregation petitions were common throughout the state. In Santee, which was in the southeastern portion of Orangeburg County, 14 of 18 African American petitioners asked that their names be removed from a desegregation petition. The group declared that “As signers of the petition we did not fully understand the meaning of the languages of the petition.” In a prepared statement, the 14 signers argued that they “did not wish” to desegregate the public schools. “We are satisfied with the public school facilities presently maintained and operated,” in Santee, “for members of the colored race,” the statement read. In Charleston County’s Moultrie District, 10 petitioners denied that they had actually signed the desegregation request, four asked that their names be removed, and 13 others claimed that they had “signed under a misrepresentation of the fact.” An African American in Kingstree went so far as

86 Panorama News, SCL.

87 Ibid.
to purchase an advertisement in a local paper to announce that he was no longer a member of the NAACP.\textsuperscript{88}

The ability of whites to use economic intimidation to get African Americans to renounce calls for desegregation is a testimony to the effectiveness of middle class white protests. The political, economic, and social dynamic of the black community in South Carolina was nuanced. The classic narrative of a united an unshakable black commitment to civil rights simply does not correspond with the evidence that white coercion, especially through economic reprisals, was frequently – if often temporarily – successful. Moreover, the successful coercion of vulnerable African Americans added to the ability of hardcore segregationists to propagate the myth that it was “outside agitators” who were to blame for the state’s racial disharmony.

Hardcore segregationists also used the success of reprisals and organized intimidation to create an oppressive air of censorship in the white community that effectively marginalized dissenting white voices. Still a small number of white racial liberals did speak out. James McBride Dabbs of the Southern Regional Council, for example, decried the intimidation of African Americans in Orangeburg. He claimed that civil rights advocates were “acting in the spirit of the fathers of the American Revolution” and warned that “the right freely to petition was one of he cherished rights bought by the blood of the Revolution.” Furthermore, Dabbs suggested that WCC activity was evidence that segregationists knew that their legal argument could not stop the federal courts from enforcing the desegregation order.\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{88} Southern School News (September 1955) 6.

\textsuperscript{89} Southern School News (September 1955) 7.
At Furman University, college officials revealed evidence of a generational schism when they seized all 1,500 copies of the student newspaper, the Echo after student editors included an article supportive of integration. In response to the school’s actions, editors Joan Lipscomb and Huby Cooper resigned from the publication. The article, which was written by Lipscomb, appeared later in The Greenville Piedmont. In it, she called the Brown decision “a fact which all the emotionalism of Southern politicians cannot alter with all their oratorical eloquence.” According to the article, many of the students at the Baptist-affiliated college favored integration. Lipscomb appealed to the “leaders of the day to lead the way, not backward by adding to already existing prejudice, but forward by promoting a program of adjustment to the situation as it stands.”

Most whites, however, had no interests in speaking against the wave of economic intimidation, occasional violence, and legislative resistance that characterized South Carolina’s response to the two Brown decisions. More importantly, many of the relatively small numbers of white liberals who may have privately criticized the most radical forms of white resistance were afraid to do so publicly. According to historian Pete Daniel, “Being a southern white integrationist in mid-fifties South Carolina required not only bravery, but also resignation to being shunned.” This was certainly the experience of Chester C. Travelstead, the Dean of the School of Education at the University of South Carolina, who called for an end to segregated schools in August of 1955. “It is my firm conviction,” declared Travelstead, “that segregation of the races in our public schools can no longer be justified on any basis.” The academic dean recognized that the white community was divided over the issue. He recommended that

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90 Southern School News (June 8, 1955) 11.
local communities form biracial committees to oversee a “gradual desegregation and integration, arrived at reluctantly but sincerely.” Following his remarks, the University decided not to renew his contract for the following year. After June 1956, Travelstead was no longer employed at the university.91

The successful intimidation of both white liberals and black activists led several state leaders to conclude that a concerted legislative effort could strengthen the effectiveness of pro-segregation activism and limit the efficacy of civil rights advocacy. Although violence, selective law enforcement, and economic intimidation had always been weapons in the arsenal of white supremacy, the Citizens’ Councils and the post-
Brown backlash brought a new level of coordination to the mechanisms for managing white supremacy in South Carolina. Before the Councils, such as in the case of Clarendon County during the original Briggs case and the intimidation of Judge Waring after Brown v. Baskin, white reprisals were typically an isolated response to a specific event that were directed at a small number of individuals. The Citizens’ Councils allowed whites to coordinate attacks on civil rights leaders and their rank and file black supporters across the state. The Councils were capable of disseminating large amounts of information and rallying white South Carolinians to a specific cause. It is revealing that, whereas in 1950-51, the A.M.E. Church felt comfortable moving Joseph DeLaine to a different town within South Carolina to preserve his safety, but by 1955 the church felt

compelled to relocate the minister to a completely different geographic region or even another country.\textsuperscript{92}

CHAPTER 6
BOMBINGS, BULLETS, AND BEATINGS: THE ZENITH OF MASSIVE RESISTANCE IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Between the 1954 Brown decision and the forced desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas in September 1957, South Carolina whites rarely questioned the state’s commitment to Jim Crow and only a tiny handful of white liberals, such as Jack O’Dowd and Alice Spearman, even dared to suggest that the state comply with the 1955 Brown implementation order. Despite this superficial unity, the widespread white endorsement of South Carolina’s system of racial apartheid remained a complex and often contradictory phenomenon.

Many whites privately sensed that token compliance and bureaucratic obstacles were more effective long-term strategies for preserving both public order and white privilege without doing irreparable harm to state and local economies, but such concerns were undercut by the continued reluctance of more moderate whites to endorse even minimal compliance. Whether from apprehension that doing so would open the way to greater desegregation, or from fear of being branded “race traitors” by the most extreme proponents of massive resistance, moderate whites rarely questioned the effectiveness of uncompromising resistance – at least not publicly.
The lack of a vocal opposition to the hardcore approach combined with the disproportionate representation given to rural counties in the General Assembly to give the impression that the vast majority of South Carolina’s white population zealously supported the hardcore segregationist agenda championed by Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr. This superficial consensus allowed for an increase in state sponsored action that was, paradoxically, prompted by the exposure of certain weaknesses within the massive resistance movement. This chapter explains how, using these advantages and motivated by anxieties over the various levels of commitment within the state’s white communities, the most determined massive resisters were able to direct official policy to the point where the state’s actions implicitly encouraged an escalation of racially motivated violence and economic intimidation in South Carolina. Moreover, it will also examine how this intensification of hardcore resistance began to drive a wedge between the state’s most recalcitrant resisters and proponents of a more legalistic and bureaucratic approach for preserving the state’s Jim Crow system.

Not surprisingly, the dogged determination of South Carolina’s most committed segregationists to prolong the illusion of white solidarity intensified when confronted with an escalation in African American demands for equality. Following the Brown decision a host of related court cases continued to undermine the basic structure of Jim Crow. For instance, in March 1955 when the United States Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals declared that racial separation in Maryland’s public parks was unconstitutional, African Americans and NAACP lawyers used the case as an impetus for challenging segregation in South Carolina’s 22 state parks, 17 of which were for whites only. The initial effort to desegregate the system was directed at Edisto Beach State Park, where
segregation had frustrated African Americans in southern Charleston County for some time. It was in a majority black area, and there was not a comparable black facility in the region. In many ways, the case was indicative of both renewed legal activism by local African Americans and of the array of bureaucratic and legal devices used by South Carolina whites to thwart those efforts.¹

In May 1955, President of the Charleston NAACP J. Arthur Brown, Charles C. Mason, and Edith Clark wrote a letter to Donald B. Cooler, the superintendent of Edisto Beach State Park, and asked for permission to stage a gathering on May 25. Charleston attorney John H. Wrighten threatened legal action if the desegregated meeting was not allowed. Wrighten’s presence as lead council was particularly worrisome for whites in Charleston County. His challenge to segregation at the College of Charleston in the late 1940s had led to the privatization of the school and it was his lawsuit against the University of South Carolina’s School of Law that had led to the creation of the law school at South Carolina State. In his letter, Wrighten warned that the group would force the issue in the federal courts if the state refused to acquiesce to its demand.²

Cooler, in accordance with state law, denied the request. He advised the group that Hunting Island State Park, over an hour away near Beaufort, had segregated facilities that could accommodate such a meeting. The Charleston chapter of the NAACP immediately called a meeting at the Morris Street Baptist Church to discuss the matter. Less than a month later, Brown and Wrighten filed a complaint against Cooler, State Forester Charles

¹ Southern School News (June 8, 1955) 11, (April 7, 1955) 13.
H. Flory, and State Park Director C. West Jacocks. The plaintiffs called on a federal appeals court to “declare that the policy, custom, usage, and practice” of segregation at Edisto Beach State Park was “in contravention of the Fourteenth Amendment.”

Initially, Brown and the NAACP attorneys were hopeful that the federal court would rule in their favor. Brown wrote, “The same Judge [Ashton Williams] who classed us with the K.K.K. and the Communist Party has informed the Attorney General of South Carolina. . . that ‘Regardless of his personal opinion, he is bound by the rulings of the Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme court.” His confidence, however, was short lived. On August 23, 1955, Federal Judge Ashton Williams, who had managed Harry Truman’s presidential campaign in South Carolina in 1948 and replaced J. Waties Waring in 1952, ruled that the complaint was a matter for the Supreme Court of South Carolina. Williams chastised the plaintiffs for stirring up racial conflict and declared that, until the state amended its constitution, segregation was the law in South Carolina. According to the judge, civil rights leaders should take care and not push too hard for civil rights. Williams and Attorney General T.C. Callison, who was the lawyer for the defendants, agreed that until the Supreme Court heard the appeal in the Maryland parks case the federal courts had no jurisdiction over the matter.

In November 1955 the United States Supreme Court ruled that the Brown decision applied to the Maryland case. According to the ruling, Maryland’s Smallwood Park and Sandy Point Beach had to immediately desegregate. Moreover, the ruling created the

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3 Letter to John L. Chisolm from Donald B. Cooler (May 21, 1955), Advertisement for NAACP meeting at the Morris Street Baptist Church (May 24, 1955), Brown Papers, Avery. News and Courier (July 24, 1955) 1A.

potential for African Americans in South Carolina to renew their challenge of segregation in the state’s park system. Moderate whites remained silent on the issue, but South Carolina’s hardcore segregationists used the controversy to encourage uncompromising commitment to a strict system of segregation in which even strategic minimal compliance was deemed unacceptable. The Darlington Citizens’ Council called on the state to sell all public parks immediately and requested permission to purchase the state-owned parks in the Darlington area. The North Charleston WCC resolved:

... that in our opinion both races, white and colored, could get along very well without any State Parks at all because only a very small percentage of our citizens now use these parks anyway. Be it further resolved that we suggest and recommend that our Honorable Governor George Bell Timmerman, Jr., and the State Forestry Commission take the necessary steps to close all of our 22 State Parks now, indefinitely, and forever if necessary, rather than permit any form of integration or breaking down of our segregation laws. 5

Like his segregationists allies, Timmerman also worried that the Sandy Point and Smallwood Park case would lead to the court ordered desegregation of Edisto Beach. Responding to those fears, the governor promised, “There will be no mixing of the races in our state parks.” Just as he had with the schools, Timmerman agreed with the various Citizens’ Councils and promised to close the parks rather than desegregate them. In February, he kept that promise. Just as a new hearing commenced before Judge Williams, Timmerman called a special session of the state legislature to discuss the matter. On February 7, 1956 the park was closed by order of the Governor and on March 1, the General Assembly passed a law that officially closed the facility. 6


6 Ibid. News and Courier (February 4, 1956) 1A.
Though the state had circumvented a desegregation order for Edisto Beach, whites were hardly confident that they could continue to forestall meaningful desegregation, especially because the Edisto Beach case coincided with other efforts to dismantle Jim Crow. Several months before the start of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama, Sarah Mae Flemming sued South Carolina Electric and Gas in an attempt to end segregation on Columbia’s public transportation system. Flemming brought the suit against the company, which operated the city’s bus lines, after she was ordered to give up her seat to a white individual. Her complaint called for $15,000 in damages and alleged that the bus driver had enforced an “unconstitutional and discriminatory” law. The case was quickly dismissed by the governor’s father, George Bell Timmerman, Sr. who was a district judge in the federal court system. Timmerman mocked the Supreme Court’s ruling in the Brown case. “Education and personality,” he scoffed, “is not developed on a city bus.”

Timmerman’s ruling was quickly overturned by the Circuit Court of Appeals when the appellate court declared that the Brown ruling had effectively overturned Plessy v. Ferguson. “That case [Plessy],” claimed the court, “recognizes segregation of the races by common carriers as being governed by the same principles as segregation in public schools.” Therefore, “the recent decisions which relate to public schools leave no doubt that the separate but equal doctrine approved in Plessy v. Ferguson had been repudiated.” Despite the new verdict, Callison ordered that the state ignore the appellate court’s ruling until the matter was heard by the Supreme Court of the United States. However, even after the highest federal court declined to review the case, thereby upholding the appeals

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court ruling, segregation continued in the state’s transit systems. The episode suggested to white segregationists that *de facto* segregation, as sanctioned by local courts and politicians, could continue in spite of federal court orders to the contrary.⁸

In spite of the state’s ability to maintain the basic framework of Jim Crow, the mounting legal victories for civil rights advocates posed an interesting dilemma for the state’s most diehard massive resisters. No meaningful desegregation had occurred, and yet, whites remained apprehensive that, without the legal endorsement of segregation as outlined in the *Plessy* verdict, the pressure to comply with *Brown* would eventually undermine white resolve. Indeed, South Carolina’s hardcore segregationists had good reason for these concerns. Members of the White Citizens’ Councils had promoted the idea that using economic pressure could prevent black challenges to Jim Crow (such as the one to the segregated state parks). Though the use of economic reprisals did shift some attention away from legal activism against *de jure* segregation, black relief efforts had allowed some African Americans to resist white economic pressure. For example, although white reprisals had effectively limited civil rights activism and NAACP membership in Orangeburg, only half of the original signers of the District Five desegregation petition had actually removed their names from the petition. The others continued to push for compliance with the *Brown* order. The willingness and ability of even a small number of African Americans to endure the reprisals was troublesome for Orangeburg whites, especially for members of the local Citizens’ Council who had coordinated the intimidation campaigns.⁹


A small cadre of the most dedicated civil rights leaders formed the “Orangeburg Movement for Civic Improvement,” a new organization that worked with NAACP leaders to raise money for those most affected by the ongoing reprisals. African American activists outside Orangeburg also helped those affected by reporting on the intimidation and distributing relief through official and unofficial NAACP channels. For example, James Hinton, the President of the South Carolina branch of the NAACP, secured a loan of $1,053 from Modjeska Simkins’ Victory Savings Bank for a petitioner who had his mortgage called in. Simkins later alleged that such fundraising efforts helped save “a number of those farms” after white fertilizer suppliers refused to deliver to black customers. Indeed, one Orangeburg rally for victims of economic reprisals raised over $3,000. Encouraged by these results, Hinton wrote to Roy Wilkins, the Executive Secretary of the NAACP, to declare, “I am proud to day [sic] that we have taken care of each person who signed a petition and who have had reprisals.” Several petitioners were relocated, the NAACP paid the rent for four signers, and numerous others were given seed and fertilizer when local merchants refused to offer them credit. In January 1956 alone, the NAACP donated $2,331.63 to Elloree members who were affected by economic reprisals.  

Local civil rights activists were also able to convince students at Orangeburg’s Claflin and South Carolina State colleges to join the effort to combat economic

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intimidation. When the students learned from the NAACP that Coca-Cola and Sunbeam bread had stopped supplying black merchants, the students ceased purchasing these products. They also refused to patronize an Orangeburg apparel store whose owner was a Council member. One local student activist pointed out that Orangeburg college students “learned how easy it was to do without Cokes,” and even became skilled at baking their own bread.11

James Sulton, a leader in the Orangeburg NAACP, and student leader Fred Moore asked South Carolina State president Benner C. Turner to join the boycott. Moore and Sulton wanted the college to limit its purchases to suppliers who did not discriminate against NAACP members. McCollom later noted that “students tried in vain to win Turner’s assurance that he was on their side – that he understood the nature of their grievances,” but, like other middle class black educators, Turner realized that publicly siding with the NAACP would lead to the loss of his own livelihood. Furthermore, he recognized that he might also face some form of punishment if he failed to quell the student unrest and refused to join the boycott. Turner encouraged Moore to end his involvement in the movement. In response, students at the school held food strikes and refused to eat in the cafeteria. When they were served Sunbeam bread, the students poured water on the bread and refused to eat it.12


Much to the dismay of Turner, McCollom, Moore, and Sultan were able to convince a large portion of the local African American community to join the students in protest. As was the case throughout the South, black activists in Orangeburg determined that most effective way to gain leverage over white civil rights opponents was through economic pressure. The State Conference of the NAACP called a meeting at the Trinity Methodist Church to organize a boycott that targeted 23 white businesses whose proprietors were members of the Citizens’ Councils. The list included Bryant’s Drug Store, Becker’s, Curtis Candy Company, Duncan Supply, Edisto Theater, Holmon Grocery, Horne Motors, Kirkland Laundry, Lane’s Television, Limehouse Men’s, Orange Cut-Rate, Smoak Hardware, Taylor Biscuit Company, Waltz Grocery, and Fersner’s 5 & 10. Black patrons were also asked to avoid purchasing products from Tom’s Toasted Peanuts, Coca-Cola, Coble Dairy, Lance Crackers, Lay’s Potato Chips, Paradise Ice Cream, Sunbeam Bread, and Shell Oil because local distributors of these products had taken part in the Citizens’ Council campaign. One service station Coke machine held a sign that read: “This machine has economic pressure. It is dangerous to insert money.”

Hinton, who was impressed by the effort in Orangeburg, wrote:

Negroes in the south can do great harm to business operated by those who would try economic reprisals against Negroes. The $16,000,000,000 market of Negroes can be the difference between success and failure in this fight for desegregation. Negroes must spend their money with their friends, whether those friends be White or Negroes. All of the enemies are not White, for some Negroes who are in business have taken the side of White Citizens Councils, and those Negroes must be denied trade for the same reason that White Merchants are denied Negro Trade.

We are not angry with any one, but we are fully determined to spend our money with those who believe in FIRST CLASS CITIZENSHIP FOR EVERY ONE,

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White or Black. I SAY AGAIN, “ORANGEBURG TEACHES A LESSON”, one that it will do well for other communities to follow.  

Council leaders disputed the effects of the NAACP counter-boycott and The Orangeburg Citizens’ Council informed its readers that the “local firms, many with a large volume of Negro business in the past, have come out publicly and strongly in favor of striking back at the integrationists.” The local WCC mouthpiece declared, “The amount of money they are losing is being offset by a picked-up, white trade, although all were, and still are willing to absorb the loss and maintain their integrity.” The paper urged its readers to frequent the affected establishments. However, this call for white solidarity was largely unsuccessful. It failed, for example, to rescue a branch of a local laundry company located near South Carolina State that was forced to close when black students stopped patronizing the facility. Indeed, less than three weeks after local blacks initiated the counter-boycott, most of the area’s white owned holding companies and distributors denied any knowledge of organized economic retaliation by African American merchants and resumed the delivery of goods to black owned businesses.

The NAACP counter-boycott also affected the Citizens’ Council in the nearby Orangeburg County town of Elloree. African American leaders reported that blacks in the small South Carolina hamlet were more united than ever. Assistance from the NAACP had helped victims of economic retaliation and rumors of white fiscal hardship circulated throughout the African American community. Black newspaperman and political activist John H. McCray reported that, even though whites still zealously


collected debts and mortgages in African American neighborhoods, “the WCC
campaign” and NAACP unity had brought economic hardship to many whites as well.16

The ability of African Americans to withstand white economic reprisals exposed
the always present, but frequently obfuscated divisions within the state’s segregationist
alliance. Mainstream whites were willing to maintain solidarity with Orangeburg’s
hardcore white supremacists for a time, but, once the reprisals began to have an adverse
effect on the local economy, some whites chose to limit their involvement in the
economic intimidation. Benjamin Muse surmised, “by the spring of 1956 the white
business community was ready in effect to cry enough.” A number of white businesses
quietly attempted to bring back African American customers without losing their
standing in the white community and several un-named white lawyers supported local
blacks with legal advice. In general, however, more moderate whites were still afraid of
openly supporting African Americans and white professionals generally continued their
refusal to endorse even minimal compliance.17

In addition to worries about the unwillingness of local white merchants to endure
the black response, more militant whites were uneasy over the inability of the ACCSC to
coordinate a statewide effort to strengthen the intimidation campaign. When local
suppliers would not sell goods to Jim Sulton’s Esso service station, he received shipments
from Standard Oil Company in Charleston, which refused to bow to Council requests to
cease doing business with him. Even during the height of WCC organized pressure,


Workman Papers, MPC. Muse, Ten Years of Prelude, 83-84.
Sulton and other local black leaders simply arranged to buy essential goods in bulk from Charleston and Columbia, and rationed out necessities to the most needy in the Orangeburg area.  

Like the struggle over implementation of the *Brown* decision all over South Carolina in 1956 and 1957, the fight to desegregate Orangeburg’s school system had reached a stalemate. The schools were not desegregated, NAACP membership had declined, and numerous petitioners had asked that their names be removed from the desegregation petition. Still, Council organized direct action campaigns declined as well, and some whites even began to question the long-term effects of WCC activities. A WCC memo from December of 1956 declared, “race relations are getting better. . . We do not expect to fan the fire as long as the NAACP stays out of Orangeburg.” In an interesting inversion of the original rationale for its formation, the Orangeburg WCC decided not to meet because the organization feared a meeting of the Council would “stir-up” the NAACP. Along with its membership, the Orangeburg Councils lost much of their funding. Embattled local WCC leaders declared that they were attempting to convince the ACCSC to take over publishing a regular newspaper, and encouraged members to submit Council dues immediately.

In sum, the stalemate in Orangeburg exposed both the strengths and weaknesses of South Carolina’s white resistance. As evidenced by the reprisals and ensuing counter-boycott, even the most well organized white intimidation campaign could not entirely impede black progress or eliminate civil rights pressures. On the other hand, it could

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19 “To the Members of the Orangeburg Citizens Council,” (December 1, 1956), Workman Papers, MPC.
redirect African American activism and delay any meaningful alterations in racial arrangements. Slowing the pace of change, however, was unacceptable to more militant whites who now realized that even well-coordinated extra-legal intimidation would not entirely eliminate African American calls for equality. Hardcore segregationists worried that, without even stronger endorsements from the state government, white backsliders, like those who refused to fight to the bitter end in Orangeburg, would continue to undermine the more militant forms of resistance.

Rural control of the state legislature meant that many of South Carolina’s most powerful white politicians agreed with this assessment and, when the inherent weaknesses of hardcore extra-legal resistance were exposed, state leaders demonstrated a willingness to make up for the ACCSC’s deficiencies. In order to bolster the vitality of South Carolina’s white resistance movement the General Assembly made the defense of Jim Crow its primary focus during the first legislative session of 1956. When Governor Timmerman called the General Assembly to a special session to close down Edisto Beach, he had also asked the legislature to pass a series of laws aimed at thwarting civil and voting rights agitation. According to one contemporary observer, the “state legislature enacted anti-integration and anti-NAACP proposals at an almost a mass production rate” and Southern School News described the change as “abrupt.” In what journalists dubbed the “Segregation Session,” the South Carolina General Assembly adopted a series of laws and resolutions that addressed civil rights activism in the state and reflected a region-wide hardening of the formal politics of massive resistance. 20

Between January and March 1956, as the limits of extra-legal resistance were being exposed in Orangeburg, state legislators worked at a fevered pitch to strengthen the embattled edifice of *de jure* segregation in South Carolina. One law required the suspension of funding for any college or university that was forced to desegregate. It also declared that if any all-white college or university was shut down, the state would close its largest black college, South Carolina State. South Carolina lawmakers also formed a committee to investigate NAACP activity at South Carolina State and passed a law that forbade any state, county, or municipal agency from employing any member of the NAACP. Furthermore, the General Assembly passed resolutions praising the Citizens’ Councils, commending Virginia for its declaration of “massive resistance” to desegregation, and demanding that the State Library Board ban a list of books that were “antagonistic . . . to the traditions of South Carolina.” The legislature also took action against federal involvement in civil rights enforcement by demanding that the United States Attorney General declare that the NAACP was a subversive organization. Additionally, it stoked the fires of massive resistance when it passed an “interposition resolution” that claimed South Carolina could overrule federal statutes that conflicted with state law. Along with Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, it was one of only four southern states to adopt such an interposition resolution.21

Even after the end of the “Segregation Session,” some state lawmakers continued to propose a seemingly endless array of bills targeting civil rights activism in South Carolina. According to Howard Quint, “In the contest to see who could introduce the most segregation bills, Representative John Calhoun Hart of Union County won handily.”

Hart unsuccessfully proposed legislation to rescind the tax exempt status of churches that allowed the Communist Party or the NAACP to meet on their property, a bill requiring all state employees to take an anti-NAACP and anti-KKK pledge, and a resolution condemning Vice-President Richard Nixon, who was a member of the NAACP, for “arousing and causing dissention among the races.” The Union County representative successfully sponsored a bill that that prohibited Union County school employees from belonging to any organization that promoted integrated schooling, a resolution demanding that the Democratic Party re-institute the two-thirds rule, and a resolution insisting that President Eisenhower reinstate segregation in the military. The success of these kinds of militant proposals prompted a white Australian visiting professor at Furman University in Greenville to declare the state’s repression of civil rights activism “as being characteristic of communism.”

Although the “Segregation Session” and the reactionary rural conservatism espoused by Hart were largely a response to grassroots black activism in South Carolina, no southern state was isolated as it developed tactics of resistance. Many of the new and proposed laws were also reactions to events in other parts of the region. For example, after the University of Alabama expelled Autherine Lucy for “disturbing the peace” early in 1956, South Carolina whites utilized the Lucy incident as a model for its own efforts to circumvent court ordered desegregation. When a federal court ordered Alabama’s flagship university to accept Lucy, a riot ensued. State officials did not blame the rioters, but argued that Lucy’s presence had incited the violent episode. Her expulsion was heralded as a victory for segregation throughout the South. So that South Carolinians

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could use a similar justification for denying African Americans admission to white schools, the General Assembly passed a measure that allowed school officials to order county sheriffs to remove any student whom school administrators deemed disruptive.  

White militants targeted South Carolina State partially out of fear that black student activists at the school might try to replicate the Lucy incident in South Carolina by seeking admission to the University of South Carolina. After students at the college were instrumental in resisting Citizens’ Council intimidation of local blacks, Timmerman ordered the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) to investigate “subversive” activity at the school. Under the direction of Fred Moore, nearly all of the school’s 1,500 students walked out of class and refused to return until SLED halted its investigation. White leaders threatened to close the school and President Turner announced that students who did not return would face expulsion. Students responded with a list of grievances and 176 of the school’s 190 faculty members signed a petition defending their right to join or support the NAACP. After six days of protests, the students finally acquiesced rather than face expulsion. Nonetheless, the all-white board of trustees expelled Fred Moore immediately and informed 11 female and three male students that they could not return for the fall semester. Several faculty members were also fired and several more resigned in protest.  

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The state sponsored intimidation at South Carolina State was a clear victory for white supremacy. The SLED investigation and threats of expulsion had augmented the WCC reprisals and provided an additional layer of white resistance to South Carolina’s already complicated racial dynamic. After the expulsion of Moore and other student leaders, it was nearly four years before a second mass protest was successfully organized at the college. By limiting student activism at the school the state demonstrated that it was not only willing to pick up the slack from a limited ACCSC, but that it was also much more effective at managing white resistance than the loose confederation of Citizens’ Councils.25

In addition to resulting in the expulsion of several student leaders at South Carolina State, the laws passed during the “Segregation Session” undercut any local effort to moderate race relations in Orangeburg and further delayed any meaningful racial progress. A.T. Brown, the City Administrator of Orangeburg, told Alice Spearman of the SRC that white leaders had hoped to organize a “human relations council” following the boycott and counter-boycott, but that every time an announcement was planned, “some situation develops in the community to add to the tensions.” Brown specifically pointed to the state investigations of the NAACP at South Carolina State as the biggest impediment to interracial cooperation in Orangeburg. He called the investigation “unnecessary, unfortunate, and politically inspired.”26

In spite of concerns such as Brown’s, the state began to vigorously enforce the new anti-NAACP statute during the summer of 1956. South Carolina sent out questionnaires

25 Ibid.

to all public school teachers that required them to divulge whether or not they favored integrated schools, whether they agreed with the “aims of the NAACP,” and whether or not they were members of the NAACP. These questionnaires and the anti-NAACP law had an almost immediate effect on South Carolina’s African American educators. For instance, in Elloree 24 teachers were either fired or resigned for refusing to sign the NAACP questionnaire. Charleston County refused to renew the contracts of more than 10 teachers – one of whom was an activist named Septima Clark who had championed black civil rights in South Carolina for more than a decade. The SRC reported that administrators in Clarendon County had begun hiring teachers without college degrees to fill the void left by the firings. According to an organizational memorandum, Principal J.T. McCain “was ousted without being given a reason, in spite of the fact that it is conceded that he is one of the best school men in the state.”

Levi Byrd, of the Cheraw branch of the NAACP, was so outraged by the new law and the rash of firings that followed that he declared that white South Carolinians “ought to know better.” In his criticisms of the new laws passed during the “Segregation Session,” Byrd concluded, “It is so low and dum (sic) the way the citizens council and others did at Ala, University thay (sic) are worst (sic) than Red Chinie (sic).” He did, however, express confidence that the federal courts would undo any discriminatory legislation passed by the South Carolina General Assembly.

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The new laws were successful in that they weakened the ability of educated African Americans, many of whom were teachers, to advocate openly for change without losing their livelihood. Rather than face state sanctions, some African American educators publicly rejected the NAACP and its goals. Indeed, many black state employees simply had a different perspective on the most appropriate forms of civil rights activism and their reaction was more than a simple response to white intimidation. For them, the NAACP’s legal challenges to Jim Crow only served to increase white oppression and threaten fragile black economic stability. According to P.B. Mdodana, a black principal and minister, the NAACP was jeopardizing the “constitutional rights” of African Americans. “If South Carolina is to be saved from the pressure group,” proclaimed Mdodana, it will be through the Negro school teachers.” He even praised the new law barring state employees from NAACP membership. “It is a pure and simple violation of trust,” he said, “for a Negro teacher to accept money from the state and use it to pay the enemies of South Carolina to tear down and destroy the public school system.” Pittmon Lemon, the principal at Carver High School, issued a public statement declaring that he was not a member of the NAACP. Lemmon announced that he had left the organization in 1950.29

In another, rather idiosyncratic, example of black criticism of the NAACP an African American minister from Kingstree went so far as to praise the White Citizens’ Councils. Reverend Webster McClary said that WCC members were “smart steady men” who had the best interests of both races in mind. He insisted that desegregation would have a detrimental effect on black education in South Carolina. “Nobody has to tell you that colored children don’t learn books as fast as whites,” he declared. He asked black

parents if they had “enough money to dress [their] brood in clothes they won’t be ashamed of,” and urged African Americans not to “slam the door in [their] white friends’ faces.”

Despite the various perspectives within the black community, the majority of the state’s African American population shared a general dislike of state repression, despised the WCC, and chafed against the daily indignities of South Carolina’s Jim Crow system. Morgan Hilton, a sixteen-year-old African American student in Clarendon County, told a reporter, “I never wished I was white. I just wished many times I was treated like the whites.” Hilton’s brother Leroy complained about the Jim Crow balcony in the local theater. “When there’s a good picture,” he said, “we’ll be standing up there even though there’s empty seats downstairs. . . Every time I go, I get mad, but I don’t say anything.”

Leroy’s 13-year-old sister complained:

I feel insulted every time I got to sit in the back of a Jim Crow bus. I feel insulted every time I go into the drugstore for ice cream or a soda. All the booths are for whites. We got to have our ice cream out on the hot street. I just wonder what makes them think they’re superior. Sometimes, you walk down the street and white people just look at you scornful. You can feel it.

Like these black Clarendon County youths, the vast majority of South Carolina’s African American population wanted an end to Jim Crow. African Americans disagreements were mostly over tactics and the appropriate pace of change. Unlike whites, however, African Americans did not possess open access to mainstream media or to state and local political office. Whites were able to use these advantages to exacerbate internal black disagreements and re-enforce the notion that only outsiders and

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30 Rev. Webster McClary quoted in Quint, Profile in Black and White, 75.
31 Ibid., 73.
professional agitators were pushing for racial change. More important, whites were able to accomplish this while simultaneously masking their own divisions and disputes.

Whites may have had a diverse range of opinions regarding the appropriateness of certain kinds of resistance, but their debates over segregation were carefully worded, and even more carefully reported on, to convey unity on the fundamental need to preserve the racial caste system. As a result, most white South Carolinians failed to recognize how thin the veneer white unity really was. Of course, even those moderates who did appreciate the nuances of white commitment to segregation rarely challenged this superficial solidarity out fear of being shunned by their white neighbors. Even when moderate whites criticized the vicious retaliations of the Citizens’ Councils and the KKK, they were careful to reaffirm their belief in separation of the races. For example, the South Carolina Methodist Conference (SCMC) condemned the Citizens’ Councils because of their aim “to exert economic pressure on a portion of [South Carolina’s] citizenry to prevent the exercise and development of their moral conscience and their civil rights according to the dictates of their conscience," but the organization refused to endorse even minimal compliance with the Supreme Court’s desegregation order. Likewise, the Florence Morning News, which repeatedly spoke out against the excesses of the WCC, the States’ Rights League, and other pro-segregation groups, concluded that desegregated schools were not in the best interest of the state’s African American population. In an editorial, the paper charged:

We believe that an integrated school system would deepen the Negro’s inferiority complex, that it would magnify his sense of being a second class citizen, that he would not develop normally under the tensions and inequalities of integration. We believe that his finest opportunities are with equal segregated facilities. We believe that he is entitled to equal facilities, that he, like his white brother, is entitled to all the benefits of being an American citizen, but for the sake of his race, its potential,
its integrity, its development, he should demand segregation in the public schools as offering the only normal, natural atmosphere in which to work for maximum racial development. 32

As evidenced by the SCMC episode and the carefully worded editorial in the Florence Morning News, between 1956 and 1957, the moderate position in South Carolina was to call for better treatment of African Americans, the continuation of the state’s “equalization” effort, and the advocacy of “voluntary segregation.” Even though each of these proposals called on the continuation of Jim Crow, such relatively lukewarm endorsements of segregation did not go over well with South Carolina’s hardcore segregationists who treated any hint of white backsliding with contempt. The Charleston News and Courier, for instance, condemned the SCMC for its critique of Citizen Council intimidation. Its editorial staff argued that members of every race enjoy the freedom of expression, but "in exercising this freedom, people must be ready to bear the consequences. If those consequences include unpopularity, public dislike or refusal to do business with them, they need not be surprised." According to the Charleston paper, "It is one thing to regard our fellow men as all God's creatures. It is quite another thing meekly to submit to pressure against customs and convictions held by our people these many centuries."33

32 News and Courier (31 August 1955) 10A. Quint, Profile in Black and White, 78.

33 Southern School News (May 1956) 14. Howard Quint pointed out that the majority of South Carolina’s white ministers argued in favor of better treatment for the state’s black population, but refused to condemn desegregation. Quint maintained that, during the late 1950s, the vast majority of South Carolina whites thought that African Americans supported segregation as strongly their white counterparts. Likewise, in April 1956, the Protestant Episcopal Diocese of South Carolina voted 94 to 43 to pass a resolution condoning the “voluntary recognition of racial differences.” The group argued that segregation “should not be characterized as Christian or un-Christian” [Southern School News (May 1956) 14]. News and Courier (31 August 1955) 10A. Quint discusses the situation in South Carolina’s white churches in “The Brotherhood of Segregated Men,” in Profile in Black and White.
The News and Courier played an important role prolonging the impression that the majority of white South Carolinians endorsed an uncompromising defense of Jim Crow. No one expressed the segregationist viewpoint more clearly than the paper’s editor, Thomas R. Waring, who skillfully pulled together the various strands of anti-integrationist sentiment into a well-articulated critique of the nascent civil rights movement that encapsulated white anxiety over changes in race and class relationships in the post-World War II period. In January 1956 Harper’s Magazine published Waring’s “The Southern Case Against Desegregation,” in which Waring criticized outsiders for issuing anti-southern “propaganda” and civil rights activists for advocating equality “at too fast a pace.” He claimed that the cultural difference between blacks and whites were “too great . . . to encourage white parents to permit their children mingle freely in school.” According to Waring, Negro parents as a whole are not so careful . . . as their white neighbors in looking after the health and cleanliness of their children.” He also pointed out that “incidence of venereal disease,” out of wedlock births, and sexual improprieties were greater among African Americans. Whites, he asserted, did not wish to expose children to the “primitive view of sex habits” practiced in black communities. He argued that desegregation would bring an increase in the amount of contact between “down and rowdies of both races,” which would lead to an increase in “interracial strife.” Finally, Waring wrote that “Southern Negroes . . . are below the intellectual level of their white counterparts.” Although there was no evidence for Waring’s pseudo-sociological characterization of black social—sexual behavior and even though (or perhaps because) it was denounced by state and national NAACP leaders, Waring’s piece drew widespread praise from South Carolina whites. The Florence County Democratic Convention lauded
the piece and Waring and the *News and Courier* also received a public endorsement from
the Kingstree Citizens’ Council. 34

Like Waring, author and South Carolina native Herbert Ravenel Sass also endorsed
segregation in a widely read national publication. In an article in *The Atlantic Monthly*,
Sass repeated the belief that school desegregation was undesirable because it would result
in miscegenation. Even “Though we have encouraged the mixing of many different
strains in what has been called the American ‘melting pot’,,” he wrote, “we have confined
this mixing to the white peoples of European ancestry.” With scant respect for evidence
or history, Sass called “the fact that the United States is overwhelmingly pure white” the
“most distinctive fact about this country.” He dismissed any criticism of racial
segregation as unjust and declared:

> It must be realized too that the Negroes of the U.S.A. are today by far the most
fortunate members of their race to be found anywhere on earth. Instead of being
the hapless victim of unprecedented oppression, it is nearer to the truth that the
Negro in the United States is by and large the product of friendliness and
helpfulness unequaled in any comparable instance in all history. Nowhere else in
the world, at any time of which there is record, has a helpless, backward people of
another color been so swiftly uplifted and so greatly benefited by a dominant
race.35

Sass described the culture of “race preference” in the South as “the most
distinctively American thing there is” and wrote that United States was “built solidly
upon” acts of “racial discrimination.” Moreover, he argued that racial separation was
perfectly consistent with natural order and declared that “a fantastic perversion of
scientific authority has been publicized in support of the new crusade [to end


segregation]. Though everywhere else in Nature (as well as in all our plant breeding and animal breeding) race and heredity are recognized as of primary importance.” 36

Like Waring, Sass also argued that it was necessary to protect states’ rights from the “Court’s usurpation of power,” and that the Supreme Court had replaced legal precedent with “sociological and psychological theory.” However, his primary argument contended:

. . . the underlying and compelling reason for the South’s refusal to operate mixed schools – its belief that mixed schools will result in ultimate racial amalgamation – has been held virtually taboo and if mentioned in the North is not examined at all but is summarily dismissed as not worthy of consideration. . . . the fear that mixed schools in the South would open the way to racial amalgamation is not a bogey or a smoke screen or a pretense of any kind but the basic animating motive of the white South in resisting the drive of the NAACP and its supporters. 37

Both Waring and Sass achieved national recognition for their defense of segregation and the prominence shared by the two South Carolinians in bringing the South’s case to the nation is noteworthy. Waring’s justifications were widely praised by southern whites and Sass’s essay was reprinted, at the request of Congressman Rivers, in the Congressional Record. Although both men spoke from the point of view of a privileged white southern male, their arguments resonated with all white South Carolinians who were upset with the rapid pace of racial change. They argued that the civil rights movement not only challenged the legal aspects of Jim Crow, but was an affront to a superior kind of democracy that was dependent on white racial purity. It is no wonder, then, that the two authors were particularly appalled by the prospect that social

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.
and educational race-mixing might lead to widespread miscegenation, which most white South Carolinians suspected would do irreparable harm to southern society.  

The justifications for *de jure* segregation employed by Waring and Sass were often echoed by other South Carolinians who were eager to defend and justify the state’s Jim Crow policies. The President of the South Carolina Farm Bureau, E.H. Agnew, for example, announced that the *Brown* ruling was a “wedge that could easily result in the destruction of all the freedoms that we hold sacred in America” and Strom Thurmond declared that “as long as we keep public sentiment strongly against integration in South Carolina, we will not have integration in South Carolina.” An Episcopal Church rector even went so far as to declare that a belief in protecting “racial integrity” was a legitimate Christian position and should not be considered “unconstitutional and un-Christian.”

Whites generally perceived the preservation of white racial purity as an obvious good and agreed with Sass’s assertion that “race-mixing” would lead to the evil of miscegenation. Therefore, according to desegregation opponents, even minimal desegregation could do irreparable harm to southern society. Micah Jenkins, who was the President of the Association of Citizens’ Councils of South Carolina, told the Kiwanis Club of Charleston that a united front against liberal agitators and “do-gooders” was the only way to preserve the southern way of life. “It is everyone’s fight,” declared Jenkins, “you’re either for segregation or against it.” The *Orangeburg Citizens’ Council*, which was printed by the *Orangeburg Times and Democrat* for the local WCC, declared that the

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38 Correspondence relating to “Mixed Schools and Mixed Blood” can be found in the Herbert Ravenel Sass Papers, South Carolina Historical Society. Correspondence relating to Waring’s article in *Harpers* is located in the Thomas R. Waring Papers, South Carolina Historical Society. Clipping of “Mixed Schools and Mixed Blood,” from *Congressional Record* in the Rivers Papers, SCHS.

“inevitable result of integration,” was that either blacks or whites would have to leave the South because “there is no room” for both races to live together. The same editorial promised that, if southerners resisted long enough, racially diverse cities in the North would join southern efforts to preserve segregation. “If the race mixing efforts [in the North and East] continue,” the opinion piece warned, “some day the white people will become so nauseated they will realize the suckers they have been and have nerve enough to stand up and demand their rights.”

These criticisms were circulated throughout the state in political speeches and Citizen Council propaganda that warned: “Millions of decent self-respecting Americans are at last awake to the true objective of the NAACP and its sinister, alien philosophy, which many people believe to be marriage of whites and Negroes.” The Orangeburg Citizens Council claimed that several prominent black leaders were in favor of miscegenation and erroneously quoted Howard University professor Roosevelt Williams as saying “It is well known that the white woman is dissatisfied with the white man, and they along with us demand the right to win and love the Negro men of their choice.”

A complicit white media, state sponsored action, and the bugaboo of miscegenation were powerful tools for encouraging South Carolina whites to continue the fight even after they began to witness the acceleration and mounting successes of civil rights activism in other Deep South states. In addition to the Atherine Lucy controversy and the Montgomery Bus Boycott in Alabama, the NAACP had stepped up its legal campaign

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40 *News and Courier* (January 6, 1956) 12A. The Orangeburg Citizens Council (February 13, 1956) 3.

against Jim Crow across the region leaving most whites fearful of an expansion of black demands for civil and political rights in South Carolina.42

In January 1956 many of South Carolina’s leading political officers attempted to maintain the momentum of the state’s diehard massive resistance movement by participating in a rally in Columbia that drew over 4,000 people to hear Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland speak at the state capital. In attendance were Representatives Rivers and John J. Riley, United States Senators Thurmond and Olin D. Johnston, Speaker of the South Carolina House of Representatives, Sol Blatt, Former Governor Ransom J. Williams, State Senator Ellison Smith, Jr., State Superintendent of Education Jesse Anderson, and former Governor James F. Byrnes.43

During the rally, Congressman Rivers praised the hardcore segregationist agenda of the WCC and criticized moderate whites who disapproved of the organization. He drew raucous applause when he called the NAACP the “National Association for the Advancement of Communist Propaganda,” and when he declared that the people of the South “had rights before you had a Supreme Court in Washington, and you didn’t give them to Mendel Rivers to give away or to Earl Warren to Destroy.” Senator Eastland urged every white South Carolinian to demonstrate their commitment to segregation by

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42 In addition to the newspaper sources cited in this dissertation, there is also evidence that radio played an important role in disseminating information that favored the continuation of segregation. For example, in an oral history interview Avram Kronsberg claims that John Rivers, Sr., who owned Charleston’s WCSC radio and television stations, was a virulent racist. Likewise, Frank Best, who owned WDIX in Orangeburg, broadcast Citizens’ Council radio programs, spearheaded efforts to open segregated private schools in the 1960s, and was a prominent supporter of George Wallace. For Kronsberg, see: Dale Rosengarten, “Oral History Interview with Avram and Edward Kronsberg” (2001), Special Collections, College of Charleston, South Carolina. For Best, see: Broadcast Archives, McKissick Museum, University of South Carolina, Columbia [Hereafter cited as Broadcast Archives, McKissick.

joining the Councils and called on the crowd to move toward “militant organization” in the defense of the Jim Crow South.44

After more than a year of these near constant reminders from political leaders and grass roots white activists that the white South was under attack and that any decline in white determination would imply a willingness to comply with the Brown verdict, rank and file whites began to action to defend Jim Crow in more confrontational ways. Indeed, the political demagoguery and the near constant reminders that a crisis was imminent fueled white anger and created an explosive combination of rhetoric and racism. In Elloree, or example, over 300 people showed up for a Council demonstration at Elloree High School after the local WCC had circulated rumors that a number of African American students were going to attempt to “integrate” the all white campus. No violence occurred, mostly due to the fact that no black students turned out for the rumored protest. However, the large crowd at the small school increased fears that a violent confrontation was inevitable and was evidence of the commitment of recalcitrant white segregationists to fight desegregation with any and every means at their disposal.45

In spite of such warning signs that militant rhetoric had fostered an increase in racial violence, state leaders had no intention of relenting when it came to calls for continued resistance. First District Congressman Rivers, for example, went so far as to compare federal efforts to enforce civil rights laws to the tactics employed by “the Kremlin.” He insisted that “the destruction of state sovereignty by either the Supreme Court or subordinate courts is as final as the destruction of the small and captive nations

44 News and Courier (January 27, 1956) 1A. Southern School News (February 1956) 16.
45 Southern School News (October 1956) 4.
behind the Iron Curtain.” Likewise, Governor Timmerman derided the “fellow travelers, left wingers, and crack-pot do-gooders” who called for even token desegregation and called integration a “very real and very meaningful part of the Communist conspiracy.” Even some religious leaders joined the fray. Olanta minister M.A. Woodson, for instance, told the Lake City Citizens’ Council that it was the duty of white South Carolinians to protect the principles of a “constitutional form of government” and a “segregated society.”

None of these statements, however, carried more weight than the “Southern Manifesto.” In the spring of 1956, South Carolina’s congressional delegation had given its unanimous support to the protection of white supremacy when each of the state’s representatives in the United States Congress signed the “Southern Manifesto.” The original draft of the document, which was actually titled a “Declaration of Constitutional Principles,” was written by Senator Thurmond. It pledged to “use all lawful means to bring about a reversal of this [Brown v. Board of Education] decision which is contrary to the Constitution and to prevent the use of force in its implementation.” According to the proclamation’s signers, the Supreme Court had ignored court precedent and constitutional law. “The original Constitution does not mention education,” it read, “Neither does the Fourteenth Amendment nor any other Amendment.” This justification was evidence to many whites that resisting federal authorities and intimidating black activists would have

no legal repercussions in South Carolina and garnered widespread support across the region.47

Even though South Carolina had avoided any meaningful desegregation and its state government was clearly committed to defending Jim Crow, South Carolina whites could not help but be affected by this kind of rhetoric from its civic leaders. As far as most whites were concerned, the state was under attack, and its very existence was at stake. The blatant fear mongering and relentless calls for racial unity led many rank and file whites to believe that citizen enforcement of the racial caste system was within the bounds of state law and implicitly endorsed by state leaders.

Between 1956 and 1957 South Carolina witnessed a marked escalation in racial violence that was largely due to a noticeable upswing in Ku Klux Klan activity. During that period Klan rallies spread across the state and cross burnings were frequent sightings on black college campuses and near the homes of African American activists. These events typically attracted crowds ranging from a few hundred to over 1,000 participants, but the largest rally occurred in Spartanburg and involved between 6,000 and 10,000 attendees. According to *Southern School News*, the gatherings “all followed the general pattern of denunciations against the Supreme Court . . . along with condemnation of other groups deemed hostile to either the South, to America, or to the KKK.” One “Grand

Titan” told an audience of over 400 that the United States Supreme Court justices were
“We now have a three percent sales tax to build nigger schools. I’ll pay three percent
more, even six percent more, if they’ll use the money to send all the niggers back to
Africa.” In a clear demonstration of how these pronouncements impacted future race
relations, a five-year-old KKK “mascot” at a rally in Chester publicly announced, “I ain’t
goin’ to school with niggers.” 48

Few episodes epitomized this escalation in Klan sponsored intimidation more so
than the string of violent incidents in Camden, which was the county seat of Kershaw
County. In addition to the cross burning and several KKK rallies, a series of racially
motivated church burnings had spread through the Camden area in 1956. The arsons
received almost no attention from South Carolina’s white media, but a letter to a black
newspaper in Norfolk, Virginia claimed that six churches had been burned, and that each
of the incidents was carried out by the various “hate groups” in Camden. Then, in July
1956 a desegregated student “work camp” drew the ire of local segregationists who
burned a cross in front of Mather Academy where the 15 interracial students were
staying. After receiving multiple anonymous bomb threats, school officials decided to
move the project to Kentucky. 49

Several months later, Guy Hutchins, the band director at Camden High School was
severely beaten after “four or five men” accused him of making “pro-integration”
statements at a local Lions Club. Hutchins was tied to tree, flogged, and threatened with

American Friends Service Committee, Department of Racial and Cultural Relations, National Council of
the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Southern Regional Council, Intimidation,
Reprisals, and Violence in the South’s Racial Crisis (n.d.), SCCHR, SCL.

49 Southern School News (January 1957) 3. Southern School News (August 1956) 9. Intimidation,
Reprisals, and Violence . . .
a hand gun and a shotgun. In a demonstration of the combustible nature of violating race/sex taboos in South Carolina, the assailants also accused the music teacher of expressing his “pro-Negro” opinions to a several white women. He was only released after promising his attackers that he would leave town immediately. If he did not, the men promised to set his house on fire. Eventually, the band teacher resigned his post. In a public statement, he said only that he had gotten another job, but refused to say where.50

In January 1957 SLED arrested Homer W. Fields, Steve B. Broadway, John Walter McManus, George Dewey Bigbee, Jr., Newal W. Seegars, and Horace William Frith. Fields, Broadway, McManus, and Bigbee were charged with assault and battery for the attack on Hutchins. The other two men were charged with conspiracy. A grand jury failed to indict Seegars and Frith, and reduced the charges against the other four to simple assault. State Solicitor T. Pou Taylor refused to lower the charge and, after months of judicial wrangling, reinstituted the original charges against all six men.51

After the case was presented to a grand jury, Judge G. Duncan Bellinger refused to give directions to the jury members. Instead, he launched into an anti-Supreme Court rant in which he declared that “Supreme Court relegated to themselves the power to amend the Constitution.” Bellinger also proclaimed that it was his “humble opinion, that as surely as there is a God in heaven, this decision will be eventually reversed.” The judge did declare that “unabated lawlessness” was not the best way to defend segregation, but it was clear that Bellinger held the Supreme Court responsible for any racial acrimony


51 Southern School News (February 1957) 11, (March 1957) 6, (July 1957) 4. Intimidation, Reprisals, and Violence . .
that surfaced as a result of the Brown ruling. Apparently, the grand jury agreed and failed to issue a single indictment in the Hutchins case. In doing so they created yet another example of how the apparatus of the state tacitly endorsed the use of violence and other forms of intimidation against anyone sympathetic to black civil or political rights.52

Unfortunately for black South Carolinians and their allies, these violent episodes were not isolated events. In October 1956, the Manning home of Reverend James W. Seals was burned to the ground while Seals visited his wife in New York. Mrs. Seals had been forced to move to Brooklyn for work after WCC economic intimidation led to the loss of her job. Seals, who was a pastor at an AME church in Summerton, was one of the founders of the local NAACP branch and a proponent of school desegregation. An NAACP press release pointed out that the minister had “received various threats because his NAACP activities, and also has been subjected to economic pressure for the same reason.”53

In this atmosphere of violent reprisals, even minor violations of Jim Crow etiquette could lead to an arrest or worse. For instance, Ruth Bishop, the wife of an enlisted man at the Charleston Naval Base, was arrested and fined $50 for sitting next to white woman on a Charleston bus operated by South Carolina Electric and Gas. The arrest was carried out despite the fact that Bishop was pregnant with her sixth child and had undergone a minor surgical procedure that very morning.54

52 Ibid.


In a reminder that white economic intimidation was still a potentially potent weapon, Billie Fleming, who was Joseph DeLaine’s nephew and President of the Clarendon County Improvement Association and the local chapter of the NAACP, saw his business wither after his name appeared on WCC boycott lists. Fleming, who was part owner of a Clarendon County funeral home, claimed that Dr. T.M. Davis, the only full-time surgeon on staff at Clarendon Memorial Hospital and the President of the Manning WCC unit, had encouraged employees at the tax funded hospital to support the Council boycotts. As a result, Fleming claimed that “many of the families who have lost relatives at the Clarendon Memorial Hospital have experienced difficulties in getting the hospital to call my establishment to pick up the remains of their loved ones.”

Like Fleming, most black civil rights supporters remained the targets of white intimidation throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s. After NAACP official Clarence Mitchell was arrested in Florence for using a white waiting room at a train station, state Representative Hart urged the use of physical intimidation to prevent future challenges to the racial status quo. “Bashing Mitchell’s head,” claimed the Union County official, “would have had a highly salutary effect on integration psychology in the Florence area.” Hart went on to predict, “We must have a showdown sooner or later. . . A few cracked heads here and there could easily avert bloodshed on a large scale later on.” According to Hart, “There’s more law and order in a South Carolina night-stick than in sociological U.S. Supreme Court opinion.” Mitchell responded that “If the white citizens of South Carolina would be free to do violence to persons who are exercising rights guaranteed by federal law, what would there be to stop them from also assaulting policemen who seek

to make them obey traffic regulations?” The NAACP leader challenged Hart to visit Washington D.C., where he could see white and black congressmen working peacefully side by side.\(^{56}\)

Incidents such as the savage beating of Hutchins, the string of church burnings, the continuation of white economic pressure caused even South Carolina’s small community of white moderates and racial progressives to lament the air of oppression enveloping the state. Florence *Morning News* editor Jack O’Dowd concluded that:

Those who should have spoken out, and did not, must look to their own consciences . . . Men seeking the fair solution have not, in two years come forward. They do not exist, or they have been unwilling to face the scorn and abuse of those in the extreme fringes of both groups . . . Hate is stronger than the forces of understanding. Today’s South is becoming dominated by those unable or unwilling to accept the good sense or even the good faith of a conflicting or modifying idea.

And, Reverend Styles B. Lines of the Grace Episcopal Church in Camden (one of the few whites who urged his congregation not to seek a radical solution to the desegregation problem) declared: “Fear covers South Carolina like a frost,” he declared, “men are afraid to speak up. There is no freedom of speech except for those who choose to run with pressure groups.”\(^{57}\)

Like Lines, many whites were troubled by the wave of violence overtaking the state, but few dared to speak out against the terrorism. Even city and county leaders who denounced the violence faced threats and intimidation from angry whites. After the home of black tenant farmer in Cowpens was bombed, the city council of Gaffney offered a


reward for information about the bombing. The next morning, a cross was burned in front of the home of one of the council members.58

Though some members of the state legislatures wanted to assume control of South Carolina’s resistance efforts as a means to temper white extremism, the fact that the legislature was supportive of the goals of organizations like the WCC, and even the KKK to some extent, created an environment within which more radical groups could, if only temporarily, flourish. In the absence of any meaningful official effort to temper the tenor of white resistance under the Timmerman regime, white participation in these kinds of violent acts reached a crescendo in South Carolina during 1957. In one of the most vicious attacks, 11 Greensville County Klansmen raided the home of Claude Creull. Creull was a prosperous African American who was a farmer and a deacon in the local Baptist Church. On July 21, the men broke in, and four of them proceeded to chain and beat Creull. According to Cruell’s wife, Fannie, the Klansmen accused her and her husband of “trying to mix with white people.” The attack was prompted by Cruell’s relationship with a white tenant named Sherwood Turner, whose children witnessed the beating. Turner, his wife, and their seven children rented a small home from Cruell and relied on their landlords for transportation. Mrs. Turner was frequently ill and relied on the Cruell family to care for her children when she was sick.59

A week later, Greenville Klansmen beat Willie Lewis Brown. J.H. Bickley, the Grand Dragon of the South Carolina KKK, declared that his organization had no involvement in the incident and repudiated the use of violence. However, A. Marshall

58 Ibid.

59 Quint, Profile in Black and White, 40-41. Southern School News (September 1957) 2.
Rochester, the leader of the Greenville Ku Klux Klan, not only admitted that the Klan was involved in the Cruell and Brown beatings, but also acknowledged participating in the incidents himself. After a police investigation, Rochester and eight others were arrested and charged with the beatings. Judge James M. Brailsford, Jr. dismissed the charges against three of the assailants. Two others were found not guilty in a jury trial. Rochester and four others were found guilty of conspiracy and assault and battery. Their sentences ranged from one to six years in prison. Rochester received the maximum sentence of a six year jail term from Judge Brailsford. Turner and his family fled the area in fear for their safety. The case and the resulting verdicts were yet another example of South Carolina’s unequal justice system and of the official sanction of violence by state authorities, but the limited prison sentences handed out to the worst perpetrators was also evidence that white South Carolinians were beginning to tire of the nearly unchecked violence that was sweeping across the state.60

That same summer, 17 white men from Wells, South Carolina savagely beat a 60 year-old black farm worker. According to one historian, the attackers simply wanted to “beat up a Negro for the fun of it.” The African American farmhand was cut with a pocket knife and pelted with soda bottles. A magistrate handling the case refused to indict 16 members of the mob. Only the group’s purported leader was brought up on charges. He was fined 50 dollars for “disorderly conduct.” The same magistrate blamed

60 Ibid.

Like the magistrate in the Wells incident, state leaders did little to persuade South Carolina’s grass roots segregationists to relent or relax in their fight to preserve segregated education. In the fall of 1956, South Carolina admitted the largest number of public school students in the state’s history. Despite the fact that the Brown implementation decision was over a year old and that the order applied directly to Clarendon County, state school Superintendent E.R. Crow boldly declared that “for the foreseeable future there will be no racial mixing in the schools in this state.” Crow insisted that the equalization program remained a legitimate tactic in avoiding compliance with the Supreme Court’s edict. According Crow, since “90 percent of all racial inequities [had] been eliminated,” there was no need to comply with the Brown verdict.\footnote{Southern School News (September 1956) 4.}

In addition to the continued denial that the state might eventually have to either comply with the Brown decision or act on its threat to close the public school system, state lawmakers also worked to enhance the already numerous legal and bureaucratic obstacles delaying desegregation in South Carolina. In the spring of 1957 the General Assembly, under the advice of the Gressette Committee, passed a new law that allowed the state’s governor to call on the South Carolina militia to maintain law and order. In the event that the desegregation of any public building or vehicle led to an outbreak of
violence, the governor could, essentially, declare martial law and order the separation of
the races to re-establish peace. The legislature also passed a number of measures directed
at specific localities. It required train and bus stations in Florence to post signs marking
segregated waiting rooms and restrooms and demanded that the membership lists of
groups advocating “equal rights” in Laurens County be made public. Another provision
that required South Carolina’s blood banks to label donations according to race was
approved by the state House of Representatives.63

For civil rights activists, the most threatening new law passed by the South
Carolina General Assembly in 1957 was a statute which required state, county, school
district, and municipal offices “to require applications in writing for employment” that
“may include information as to active or honorary membership in or affiliation with all
membership associations and organizations.” Since the NAACP had challenged the
state’s anti-NAACP law in federal court, state lawmakers repealed the 1956 ordinance
and replaced it with a new law that did not single out particular organizations. State
officials hoped that the new legislation could withstand judicial challenges. White
leaders also hoped to stay one step ahead of black activists in the courts. For African
Americans, the change meant that a whole new legal challenge had to be mounted against
South Carolina’s most recent attempt to criminalize NAACP membership. This new law
was especially dangerous after South Carolina passed legislation authorizing the state
attorney general to investigate non-profit organizations in South Carolina. Meanwhile,

some state lawmakers began advocating the creation of state agency similar to the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission.64

The state’s apparent determination to preserve Jim Crow at all cost was especially problematic after President Eisenhower ordered troops from the 101st Airborne Division into Little Rock, Arkansas to protect nine African American students who were integrating the all-white Central High School in the fall of 1957. Nearly every politician in South Carolina condemned Eisenhower for using the military to enforce a federal court order. Congressman Rivers even blamed the inability of the United States to launch a successful mission into space before the Soviet Union on the president’s misplaced interest in racial politics.65

Combined with the passage of the Civil Rights of 1957 in August, the forced desegregation of Central High School was an important indicator that federal enforcement was a very real possibility in every southern state. Like state leaders in South Carolina, Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus had declared his uncompromising determination to fight to the bitter end to preserve Jim Crow. Nevertheless, white leaders remained steadfast in their opposition to even minimal compliance with Brown. The Anderson Independent predicted that federal enforcement of the desegregation order would result “in violent acts by hoodlums, bedsheet gangsterism and vandalism.” The upstate newspaper bemoaned, “It does not seem to have gotten through the thick heads in Washington and elsewhere in the North and West that Southerners will not quail in the


65 News and Courier (October 22, 1957) 1A.
face of bloodshed, if bayonets are directed against them by hogwild racist South-baiters.”

*The State* paper in Columbia placed all blame on the federal judiciary. “There was no disorder,” it claimed, “until the judge caused the Arkansas Guard to be removed.”

There were, however, some indications that South Carolina’s always uneasy coalition of segregationist whites was about to unravel over economic and social concerns. During the summer of 1957, a group of ministers from the Pee Dee region in northeast South Carolina circulated a “prospectus” calling for a more moderate approach to race relations in the state. The organization, which called itself “Concerned South Carolinians,” called for “moderate” South Carolinians to submit essays for a publication. The works that were collected were eventually printed in a pamphlet titled *South Carolinians Speak: A Moderate Approach to Race Relations.*

The group of ministers, which included Reverends Ralph E. Cousins, Joseph R. Horn, III, Larry A. Jackson, John S. Lyles, and John B. Morris, argued that white South Carolinians should back away from “extreme positions.” They also alleged that “organized groups are feeding the flames of racial hate,” and professed their belief that “a large group of South Carolinians disagree with” the extremism of both the “NAACP” and the “Citizens’ Councils.” In their call for submissions, the ministers wrote:

> South Carolina needs people who will steer a course between the excesses of certain Citizens Councils on the one hand and the extreme actions of the NAACP on the other. It is imperative that persons in South Carolina who are honored and respected in their several communities speak words of calmness and moderation.

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This is the conviction which has drawn us together as ministers of Christ and as concerned citizens of South Carolina.

The statement drew an immediate response from South Carolina’s hardcore segregationists. The Florence WCC scoffed at the notion that it was an “extremist” organization and challenged the ministers to “prove when and where the Citizens’ Councils have acted contrary to the law.”

Nonetheless, 12 whites from South Carolina contributed essays to *South Carolinians Speak*. The nine men and three women who wrote essays for the publication were a mix of lawyers, doctors, businessmen, and professionals. Their educations and occupations made them atypical South Carolina whites, but they did represent most of the state geographically. Even though the authors admitted *de jure* segregation had no place in a democracy, a few essayists hoped for a continuation of voluntary segregation in education in order to prevent the “irritations and turmoil that will prevail if integration is forced on the public schools.” Most of the authors, however, recognized that South Carolina could not win a showdown with the federal government over segregation, that Jim Crow and public order were no longer compatible, and that the state needed to foster a greater degree of interracial cooperation to solve the desegregation problem. Despite overwhelming evidence from their state and across the South to the contrary, most of the authors insisted that African Americans were not yet ready or willing to push for meaningful integration. Therefore, they reasoned that biracial negotiations could provide a solution that was agreeable to the majority of both black and white South Carolinians.

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69 Cousins, et al, *South Carolinians Speak*. 
To South Carolina’s few white liberals, the moderate tenor of the pamphlet seemed encouraging, especially when compared to the state’s official position in 1957. Benjamin Muse, for instance, contended that many South Carolinians had given up on saving *de jure* segregation. He argued that white South Carolinians, especially middle class urban and suburban whites, were appalled by the post-*Brown* violence and the re-emergence of the KKK in South Carolina and had placed their hopes for maintaining racial segregation into plans for voluntary separation. Though neither Muse nor the contributors of *South Carolinians Speak* necessarily agreed with the state’s black activists in matters concerning the pace of change, their repudiation of the more militant forms of white resistance was a notable sign of white middle class discontent with the various tactics the massive resistance movement. 70

Undoubtedly, many white South Carolinians agreed with at least some of the proposals presented in the pamphlet, but it was the violent reaction from the state’s most militant segregationists that provided an even more persuasive argument for altering the state’s commitment to the most oppressive forms of massive resistance. Mainstream whites may have been willing to look at KKK intimidation of African Americans and declare that blacks were somehow “asking for it,” and they may even have tolerated an occasional attack on some “misguided” white liberal, but middle class South Carolinians were caught off guard on the night of November 19, 1957 when the home of co-author

Claudia Sanders was bombed by a group of local klansmen who were outraged at her endorsement of gradual desegregation.71

From its planning stages, the bombing was disorganized mess. Two of the Klansmen, James Roy McCullough and Robert Martin constructed the first bomb by attaching an alarm clock to dynamite and taping them to a keg of nails. They then placed the homemade explosive in the Sanders garden. After the timer failed to detonate the device, the two men, and fellow klansman John E. Painter decided to light a stick of dynamite, drive past the Sanders home and throw the explosive at the unexploded bomb in the garden. Fortunately for the Sanders family, the wick went out on the dynamite and the second attempt by the amateur terrorists was also unsuccessful.72

The failed conspirators finally overcame their own incompetence after local klavern leader Luther Boyette returned from an out of town trip and enlisted the aid of his brother-in-law Cletus Sparks. Boyette, Martin, and Sparks (McCullough was working the graveyard shift at a local textile mill) drove to the Sanders home. This time, Sparks lit the fuse and Martin heaved the dynamite toward the residence. Several minutes later, the explosive detonated and blasted a large hole in the Sanders’ chimney, terrifying their family and several friends who were visiting from out of town. Had the third attempt to harm the Sanders family detonated the first two, most or all of the occupants of the home would have most certainly been severely injured or possibly killed.73

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According to historian Timothy Tyson, the state’s newspapers offered a “lukewarm” condemnation of the violent episode, but as usual blamed the incident on the heightened racial tensions and insisted that it was civil rights activists who had “incited” the Klan in the first place. Although public officials condemned Klan activity in general, no one of note declared their support for Sanders’s right to offer her opinion on the matter. One of the editors of *South Carolinians Speak* noted that state leaders approached their response to Klan violence with far less fervor they had their condemnations of the president’s use of force in Little Rock.74

Still, according to contemporary observer Howard Quint, “respectable South Carolinians were appropriately shocked.” Sanders was a member of at least four “old Charleston” families. She had graduated from the prestigious Ashley Hall girls’ school and her husband was a local physician in Gaffney. For upper and middle class whites, the specter of members of the white working class blowing up the home of a prominent white woman was an affront to white southern notions about gender and class. Likewise, the incident raised the ire of the State Law Enforcement Division, which was determined to arrest those responsible for disturbing the public order in Gaffney.75

Finding those responsible was not difficult. Quint observed, “With all due respect to the extremely efficient SLED, it required neither a Sherlock Holmes nor a Dick Tracy to track down the culprits, for the trail led directly to a Ku Klux Klan group operating in the area.” Boyette, Martin, McCullough, Sparks, and Painter were arrested soon after the incident. The investigators found the minutes from Klan meetings in Boyette’s car, and

74 Ibid.
75 Quint, *Profile in Black and White*, 172-173.
the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) determined that dirt in the nail keg bomb was from the yard of the Klan’s meeting house. Martin gave a full confession to SLED officers and implicated the other men in the attack.76

The next day, the five men were released on bond. They did not, in any way, attempt to conceal their involvement in the crime and all five men spoke about the attack at a KKK rally in Gaffney in early January. Shortly after that Klan meeting, a car that Martin was working under mysteriously fell, killing him. As Tyson noted, most Gaffney residents assumed he had been murdered for giving a confession to SLED agents, but his death was ruled accidental by local authorities. After his death, magistrate I.B. Kendrick reasoned that, even though Martin’s testimony was witnessed by law enforcement officers and notarized, it was “hearsay,” and therefore inadmissible in a court of law. Kendrick also threw out the KKK minute book found in Boyette’s car. The case disintegrated and only Painter and McCullough were brought to trial. Both men were defended by State Senator John D. Long of Union County, who was able to win an acquittal in each case.77

Following the Sanders bombing, the capstone of increasingly violent and desperate attempts to hold the line of complete segregation, South Carolinians were left to ask themselves whether they were willing to tolerate overt violence in order to silence dissension in the white ranks. With the specter of federal enforcement of the Brown decision hanging over the entire region, many whites came to realize that the preservation of Jim Crow would no longer ensure public order. In fact, some whites finally began to

76 Tyson, “Dynamite and the ‘Silent South’,” 275-297.

77 Ibid.
appreciate that it could have precisely the opposite effect. The attack on Sanders was a
reminder that, when state leaders implicitly encouraged whites to resist any alteration in
the racial status quo, more militant segregationists would not hesitate to light the fuse of
racial violence. South Carolina’s state courts, its civic leaders, and its elected officials
had helped to create a climate where some white extremists felt comfortable taking
drastic measures to defend the state’s rigid system of Jim Crow. In the process, however,
they also convinced many whites that unchecked white resistance was not necessarily in
the state’s best interests.
CHAPTER 7
FISSURES IN THE FACADE OF WHITE UNITY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

By the end of 1956 many whites in South Carolina began to look for options other than the crudest forms of massive resistance to the threat of desegregation. Support for hardcore segregationists was still strong in some sections of the state, especially in the rural black belt, but middle and professional class whites in South Carolina’s urban and suburban areas had become uncomfortable with the steady increase in overt racial hostility in the first two years after the Brown decision. Though they rarely voiced these feelings publicly until after 1957, there were always indications that some white South Carolinians preferred the use of more bureaucratic and legalistic tactics that drew less attention from civil rights proponents. Indeed, the lengths to which federal authorities were willing to go to enforce court rulings was unknown in the late 1950s and some whites hoped to circumvent a confrontation with federal regulators by avoiding militant resistance in favor of these less overt approaches.

Ultimately, as this chapter explains, a combination of civil rights victories and clear examples of federal enforcement led a large portion of South Carolina’s white population to move away from the hardcore position. Moreover, it will explain that the fears of hardcore segregationists about the willingness of some whites to adopt less militant forms of resistance were exacerbated by the outcome of the elections of 1956, which exposed the divisions within the state’s white communities. As these cracks in the façade of white unity became fissures a year later, several competing strategies for protecting the racial hierarchy shared time on the public stage and white leaders adopted competing and even
contradictory resistance strategies. At times, two or more seemingly incompatible agendas were promoted by the same politician. With this in mind, this chapter also describes how the veneer of white unity, always more fragile and vexed than many assumed, finally cracked – only to be glossed over by a new consensus built around the idea of limited managed compliance with integration orders and civil rights demands that alienated South Carolina’s most uncompromising segregationists.

On the surface, it seemed that hardcore segregationists had the upper hand in South Carolina during the late 1950s. Many whites refused to believe that the federal government could enforce the court’s desegregation order in South Carolina and massive resisters insisted that the South could protect segregated education and avoid compliance with federal desegregation orders. As late as the summer of 1957, the membership rolls of South Carolina’s most uncompromising segregationist organizations were substantial. The leader of the Association of Citizens’ Councils of South Carolina (ACCSC), Thomas D. Keels, for instance, claimed that the Councils had over 55,000 members. Though it had already begun what would become a terminal decline, the ACCSC still had the support of the governor and widespread backing in the South Carolina General Assembly.¹

Many of the state’s most militant white resistance advocates operated from positions of significant power within South Carolina’s state government. The delegation from Union County, for example, used state funds to purchase nine semi-automatic guns

and 1000 rounds of ammunition for the purpose of giving the sheriff and his eight
deputies the firepower to “repel any invasion by federal troops or anyone else violating”
South Carolina laws. Other state leaders proposed less violent, but no less militant
solutions to the desegregation crisis. Governor Timmerman, for instance, pledged to
follow through with threats to close the public school system and do without federal
education funds if necessary to avoid desegregating South Carolina’s school system. The
governor claimed that he was “opposed to children attending school with bayonets
pointing in their backs,” and proclaimed that southern leaders should “Let federal agents
patrol empty halls and empty classrooms, let them point their weapons at the backs of
empty seats” rather than surrender to federal force. Timmerman also accused “moguls of
centralization” of “left-winging along in a frenzied rush to outdo the other side of the Iron
Curtain in nationalizing everything presently involving a free people’s choice” and
claimed that “resurrected reconstructionists” had launched a crusade to take “the Bible”
out of schools and replace it with Gunner Myrdal’s *An American Dilemma*.2

Despite some internal disagreements, white segregationists encouraged this kind of
grandstanding as a means to convince federal authorities that a peaceful desegregation
was impossible in South Carolina. Former State Senator Paul Quattlebaum, for example,
argued in a letter to President Eisenhower that non-southerners were incapable of
understanding the social turmoil that desegregation would cause and insisted:

“The South fought a war to maintain states’ rights. Though defeated on the battle
field, we are still fighting. You however, do not understand us, nor do we

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Attorney General Callison also endorsed the idea of refusing federal education funding. He claimed, “We
need no aid from the federal government and we want none for our public school system,” see: *Southern
School News* (February 1957) 11.
understand you. . . You have lost face in the South because you advocate things that we consider contrary to states’ rights.³

In most cases, the deep racism among South Carolina whites led them to believe quite sincerely that, even if they disagreed with the most militant forms of resistance, the preservation of segregated education was a laudable goal. Indeed, the vast majority of white South Carolinians agreed that desegregated education would be an abject failure and few were willing to “sacrifice” their children’s education to what state leaders deemed a “sociological experiment.” For example, Harold Petit, a Charleston businessman, told the Associated Press that “The Negro is irresponsible in every degree.” Although he felt that many of the problems faced by African Americans could be diminished by a better education and more economic opportunity, Petit refused to acknowledge that a desegregated education was a good place to start. He echoed many of the arguments presented by Thomas R. Waring and Herbert Ravenel Sass a year earlier when he argued that mixing black and white school children would lead to the “mongrelization of the races” and create “a South which is predominately mulatto.”

Middle class whites, such as Petite, worried that any disruption in the quality of the white education system would make white workers more vulnerable. For a generation that was barely removed from the difficulties of the Great Depression, class and status anxieties provided an additional incentive to preserve racial inequality in South Carolina.⁴

Even after President Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne into Little Rock and border states, such as West Virginia, began to voluntarily comply with the Brown verdict, the South Carolina General Assembly, with support from rank and file whites, continued


⁴ Southern School News (January 1957) 3.
to pass new legislation that targeted civil rights activism and strengthened Jim Crow. In
April 1958, a commission to investigate “communist activities” in South Carolina was
established by the state legislature. Timmerman promoted the new committee as both an
important part of the state’s defense of white supremacy and of the national crusade
against world communism.⁵

Like the earlier investigation of communism and NAACP activity at South
Carolina State, the new committee was largely a response to burgeoning activism at
South Carolina’s black colleges. In the years preceding the creation of the committee,
Timmerman and other white segregationists had a series of confrontations with the
students and faculty at Allen University and Benedict College in Columbia. Both schools
were private, religiously affiliated institutions that catered to black college students. In
1958 a number of those students had requested admission to the all-white University of
South Carolina. In his inaugural address, Timmerman claimed that the “presence of
Communists at these two negro institutions” was a grave threat to the security of South
Carolina and to the United States as a whole. He insisted that “communist agitators” at
the schools had “duped” African American students into supporting desegregation in
South Carolina. Timmerman also claimed that “an investigation of Communist activities
has led to the discovery of a record in the possession of the college [Allen University]
relating to several faculty members” that alleged that three faculty members were
engaged in communist-front organization at the school. In response to student activism
and Timmerman’s charges, the South Carolina School Board rescinded the school’s

⁵ Paul Lutz, “Desegregation: A Crisis Without Drama,” *Journal of the West Virginia Historical
Investigate Communists Activities in South Carolina,” *Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical
accreditation, which made it impossible for Allen graduates to earn a state sanctioned teaching certificate.⁶

While such maneuvers attested to official white determination to thwart desegregation and crush black activism, they occurred simultaneously with the growing sense that a large segment of the white population was disturbed by the wave of bombings, beatings, and racially motivated intimidation that had swept through the state in 1956 and 1957. The rhetorical firestorm emanating from the mouths of the most dynamic and militant massive resisters may have temporarily eclipsed competing viewpoints and alternative resistance strategies, but it did not eliminate them.

A large number of whites had initially joined the Citizens’ Councils hoping to discourage violence, not endorse it. Even in towns such as Elloree, where Councils were very effective at using the power of economic reprisals to stifle civil rights activism, some WCC members vocally opposed the use of violence. Former Congressman Hugo Sims told Alice Spearman, the Executive Director of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations, that the main reason whites supported the Councils was to limit the influence of the Klan. According to Sims:

For many years the town [Elloree] was run by a political machine headed by the mayor. This machine was composed primarily of persons of the “KKK variety.” The better element in the town in the last election succeeded by a close margin in putting in the town office as mayor a much higher type man. Then, the school petition presented by the N.A.A.C.P. caused the political pot to boil again. In an effort “to beat the rowdies to the draw,” a W.C.C. was formed and Mr. H.L. Bowling, a former teacher, who now operates a gin, was made president. Mr. Bowling is admired and liked by whites and Negros (sic) alike. The charter set

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forth on purpose in words not unlike a statement which a human relations council might make.7

Many middle class South Carolinians looked down on the “rednecks” and Klansmen who had brought so much negative attention to Mississippi and Alabama. Florence Chief of Police Julian Price, for instance, attended a speech given by Clarence Mitchell, the Director of the Washington Bureau of the NAACP, at Trinity Baptist Church. Price, who was a member of the local White Citizens’ Council, justified his position in the front row of the civil rights leader’s speech by declaring, “There has been a lot of telephone calling relating to this meeting. I don’t want another Alabama or Mississippi incident in South Carolina. That’s why I am here.” For his part, Mitchell praised the “citizens of Florence,” many of whom he claimed had supported him, but condemned the WCC, who he blamed for inciting “violence of the kind used on Singer Nat King Cole in Birmingham.”8

Like Price, many white South Carolinians had become suspicious of the kinds of resistance that were ubiquitous in some areas of the Deep South. Furthermore, as the region’s reputation for lawlessness began to attract national attention, many upper and middle class whites in the Palmetto State began to look for alternatives to the kind of hardcore resistance promoted by the Citizens’ Councils of America. This trend was first


8 NAACP Press Release (April 24, 1956), Papers of the NAACP, Microfilm Edition, Part 20, Reel 10. Price was most likely specifically referring to riotous response when Autherine Lucy attempted to enroll at the University of Alabama and the savage murder of young Emmett Till in Money Mississippi. However, there was a general sense among many South Carolinians that Mississippi and Alabama were overwhelmed by lawlessness. Also, Cole was attacked while performing by members of the White Citizens’ Council in Alabama at the behest of Council leader Asa Carter. Brian Ward, “Race, Politics, and Culture: The Cole Incident of 1956,” in eds. Melvyn Stokes and Rick Halpern, Race and Class in the American South Since 1890 (Providence, RI: Berg, 1994) 181-208 and Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness, and Race Relations (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 95-105.
exposed during the elections of 1956, which revealed significant differences between the political potency of the ACCSC and its counterparts in Mississippi and Alabama.9

The majority of South Carolina whites, especially those in the black belt region, had voted against the national Democratic Party in the presidential elections of 1948 and 1952 and endorsed Strom Thurmond’s senate primary campaign in 1950. Though they were unable in 1950 and 1952 to overcome the combination of white New Deal loyalists and black Democratic voters, the political solidarity of white South Carolinians in these political contests was evidence of a deep hostility toward black rights and a steadfast resolve to limit federal interference in southern racial arrangements.

As had been the case in 1948 and 1952, white South Carolina Democrats were once again left to debate the merits of party loyalty after the national Democratic Party’s official 1956 platform included a strong civil rights plank. Unlike in 1948 and 1952, however, a viable third option was not immediately available to disgruntled southern whites. Since the previous election, Eisenhower, who had overwhelmingly won the white vote in 1952, had appointed Earl Warren, who many whites subsequently blamed for the Brown verdict, as Chief Justice; enforced desegregation in the armed forces; and allowed the Justice Department to investigate civil rights violations. Despite the best efforts of Timmerman to convince southern governors to support a Dixiecrat-like third party, there was little interest in abandoning the Democrats among other well-known politicians.10

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Many whites felt that the state had no option but to return to the Democratic Party and hope for the best. After the national convention in Chicago, even Timmerman attempted to put a positive spin on the party’s position on civil rights. According to the governor, southerners had won “a decisive victory” in their efforts to create a more moderate civil rights plank. He claimed that “the rejection of specific language in the 1952 platform” that had promised to expand the federal government’s role in civil rights enforcement was a clear southern victory and evidence of the successful efforts of massive resistance throughout the region. The governor dismissed the idea of supporting the Republican candidate. He declared that Eisenhower’s efforts to desegregate the school system in the District of Columbia were “100 percent more damaging than the decision of the court itself.” Neville Bennett, the South Carolina Democratic Party Chairman, claimed that he had received assurances from Adlai Stevenson that the party’s candidate for the presidency would not forcibly implement federal desegregation rulings and Stevenson himself wrote to the Camden News and promised to use the “prestige” of the presidency to work out a compromise on the desegregation issue.11

Despite their public argument for party loyalty, most of South Carolina’s leading Democrats were not truly convinced that Stevenson would restrict civil rights enforcement on the federal level and some state leaders eventually chose to express those views to South Carolina voters. After the convention, 36 members of the South Carolina delegation signed a “statement of opposition” against the civil rights plank in the party’s platform. However, given that Eisenhower had supported the desegregation of South Carolina’s military bases and that the Republican Party’s platform also contained a strong

11 Southern School News (September 1956) 4.
civil rights plank, most of the delegates eventually endorsed the Stevenson candidacy. Many were convinced that protecting southern seniority in congress was cause enough to remain loyal to the national party. Like most elected officers, the state Democratic Convention also endorsed Stevenson by a vote of 167 to 152 ½. Even though the vote was close, it was a sharp contrast to the previous two elections. The party had endorsed Stevenson in 1952, but it did so with a special caveat that allowed party members to support and vote for Eisenhower. There was no such stipulation in the first post-\textit{Brown} presidential contest. Moreover, after the State Democratic Convention, even hardcore segregationists, like Governor Timmerman and Congressman Rivers issued calls for party unity and endorsed Stevenson. Their approval of the national Democrat is evidence that South Carolina’s elected officials recognized the futility of supporting a third party candidate. Timmerman had spent months rallying for a united southern party and Rivers had not supported the Democratic Presidential nominee since 1944. According to Timmerman, the choice of Stevenson was “the best of a bad lot.”\footnote{\textit{News and Courier} (August 17, 1956) 1A. Gregory B. Sampson, “The Rise of the “New” Republican Party in South Carolina, 1948-1974: A Case Study of Political Change in a Deep South State” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of North Carolina, 1984) 254-257.}

Nonetheless, many rank and file white South Carolinians still felt alienated by the national Democratic Party. By the end of September, a group of grass roots “dissident Democrats” had formed “South Carolinians for Independent Electors” and demanded that the state place their organization on the presidential ballot of 1956. The group, which had promised to award all “un-pledged” ballots to Virginia Senator and massive resistance proponent Harry F. Byrd, issued a statement declaring its belief in “the restoration of constitutional government,” respect for “states’ rights,” and against “federal
interference in school matters.” In order to assure itself a place on the ballot, the
organization recorded more than 36,000 signatures on its petition, even though state laws
only required 10,000. It also received the endorsement of Senator Thurmond and former
Governor James F. Byrnes. 13

“South Carolinians for Independent Electors,” was a hodgepodge of WCC leaders,
former Dixecrats, and veterans of the “South Carolinians for Eisenhower” movement.
Nearly all of the organization’s leaders had voted Dixecrat in 1948, for the independent
Eisenhower ticket in 1952, and had supported the Citizens’ Councils after the Brown
decision. For example, Farley Smith, Micah Jenkins, S.E. Rogers, Stanley Morse, and
Thomas Stoney all played a leadership role in “South Carolinians for Independent
Electors.” Smith, who was the organization’s chairman, Jenkins, and Rogers were all
prominent members of the ACCSC. Morse was the chairman of the Grass Roots League,
and Stoney, who was a former Charleston Mayor, was a Council member who had been a
well-known Dixecrat in 1948. 14

After a strong start, however, the “un-pledged electors” movement fizzled. In
doing so, it revealed some deep-seated schisms among white voters and gave an early
glimpse of the kinds of divisions that would undermine later efforts to preserve white
solidarity. Three separate studies of the presidential election of 1956 later found that
white voters were divided across regional and socioeconomic lines. Overall, Stevenson
collected just over 45 percent of the vote, compared to less than 30 percent for Byrd and

13 Southern School News (October 1956) 4.

14 Donald Fowler, Presidential Voting in South Carolina, 1948-1964 (Columbia: Bureau of Governmental
White, 137-138.
25 percent for Eisenhower. In contrast to the previous two elections, a majority white vote failed to emerge. The “un-pledged electors” movement, unlike the Dixiecrats and the independent Eisenhower campaign, was a complete failure with voters. Voters in only 11 of South Carolina’s 46 counties cast a majority of their ballots for Byrd. Even black belt counties like Berkeley, Orangeburg, and Dorchester demonstrated limited support for the WCC-backed campaign and awarded the independent ticket a mere plurality. Moreover, according to political scientist Gregory Sampson, the socio-economic and regional divisions among white voters combined with a decrease in voter turn-out to demonstrate a sense of ambiguity “as to which party or candidate held the least objectionable position on the issue of black civil rights.”

The presidential election of 1956 was the only contest between 1948 and 1972 in which fewer South Carolinians voted than in the prior election. More than 40,000 voters in South Carolina chose to stay home rather than choose between Eisenhower and Stevenson for a second time. In his dissertation, Sampson concludes that “when given the choice of a racially moderate Republican presidential candidate and the symbolic representation of a movement organized around racially reactionary politics, white voters in the black belt counties overwhelmingly preferred the latter,” but, in more urban and suburban areas, many white (and even some black) voters were conflicted over which candidate best represented their interests. Sampson and political scientists Bruce Kalk and Donald Fowler agree that persistent New Deal loyalties combined with a divided

white vote to hand victory to Stevenson in the election, thereby revealing the thin veneer of white unity.\textsuperscript{16}

Aside from being a sign of political divisions in the state’s white communities, the election results also exposed the inability of the ACCSC to convince white voters to endorse a protest candidate with no hope real hope of actually winning the general election. Unlike third party backers in 1948, the organization simply could not convince enough mainstream white voters to abandon the two major parties in 1956. Many Council members undoubtedly supported the goals of the ACCSC without voting for the organization’s preferred candidate, but the WCC’s inability to operate a campaign with the same level of organization as the “South Carolinians for Eisenhower” was revealing. In 1956, the ACCSC was the largest civic group in the state and it had an established organizational structural, yet, it was still unable to mount an effective statewide electoral campaign.

The poor showing of the independent movement was not the only political failure for the ACCSC, nor was it the only indication that many whites were searching for alternatives to uncompromising segregation. The Councils also failed in their efforts to apply pressure to state officials to endorse their commitment to radical massive resistance. The North Charleston Citizens’ Council sent a questionnaire to each of South Carolina’s United States Congressmen asking for their views on the segregation issue. S.E. Rogers, the ACCSC’s Executive Secretary, promised to make the results available to “members of the Councils and the public generally.” The survey asked:

Do you give your whole hearted support to the actions to maintain segregation that have already been taken by the state of South Carolina?

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
Are you willing to advise those voters, Negroes or otherwise, advocating policies of integration, not only that they need not expect you to fight, with every means at your disposal, any attempt to bring about integration of the races?

Has the NAACP, or any other organization dedicated to the breakdown of segregation in South Carolina, made any financial contribution, directly or indirectly to your campaign?

Do you here and now, promise not to seek the Negro vote directly or indirectly?

Are you a member of the Citizens’ Council?

If not, will you join a Citizens’ Council?17

In many areas of the South, failure to join or support the WCC could mean a serious electoral challenge from a Council friendly candidate. Most of the members of the South Carolina delegation, however, simply refused to answer the questionnaire. All but one of the state’s delegates to the United States House of Representatives declined to join or claim membership in a Council chapter. Instead, Representatives Riley, William Jennings Bryan Dorn, Robert T. Ashmore, Rivers, and McMillan sent a joint letter in response to the questionnaire. The letter touched on most of the key elements in the segregationist rationale for opposing civil rights activities, but it did not specifically answer the Council query:

We believe continued segregation to be in the best interest of South Carolina and the United States. Our country is threatened from around and from within by an atheistic menace which will stoop to any methods to create unrest and disunity. South Carolina’s record of tolerance, patriotism, and understanding is second to that of no other state. It is far superior to that of some other states which spawn the chief critics of our way of life and harbor fugitives from justice.

There are in South Carolina many patriotic colored citizens who are not misled by outside agitation and who are working at the local level with our white citizens to

17 S.E. Rogers to William Jennings Bryan Dorn (May 5, 1956), Dorn Papers, MPC. News and Courier (May 27, 1956) 14D. S.E. Rogers to William D. Workman (May 4, 1956), (A copy of the questionnaire is attached to this letter), Workman Papers, MPC.
solve this complex problem. They are helping to promote unity among our people at a time when it is most needed.\textsuperscript{18}

Of the state’s two United States Senators, only former Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond returned the completed survey, though he also refused to join a WCC chapter. Senator Olin D. Johnston sent Rogers a letter in which he denied that he had been contacted by the NAACP, pledged his support for segregation, and reminded Rogers that he was a frequent speaker at Council functions. Johnston did not claim membership in the organization, but he encouraged the ACCSC to “remain in the hands of responsible and law-abiding citizens.” The senator also made sure that Rogers realized that he defended segregation on radio, from the floor of Congress, and in public speeches. He also boasted that he had signed the Southern Manifesto.\textsuperscript{19}

Although all of the state’s representatives replied to the Council inquiry, it is noteworthy that only Rivers belonged to the organization. Each member of South Carolina’s congressional delegation, and the two candidates for the House of Representatives in the Fifth Congressional District used the questionnaire to reaffirm their faith in the doctrines of white supremacy. However, the delegation clearly did not view membership in the WCC as a litmus test for retaining white electoral support. Their response indicated that South Carolina’s white leadership wanted to retain some degree of flexibility as it navigated the complicated politics of massive resistance. Moreover,


the ability of South Carolina’s political elite to deny a WCC request without consequences foreshadowed later developments.

Like South Carolina’s congressional delegation, white officials in the General Assembly continued to denounce desegregation and demonstrate their commitment to uncompromising resistance. However, also like their congressional counterparts, there were tentative signs of a pending changes in those commitments by the end of 1957. Nearly all of the laws passed by the South Carolina General Assembly to protect segregation in 1956 and 1957 were of the hardcore variety, but one new statute was evidence that some lawmakers were already concerned with preparing for a more bureaucratic and less confrontational way to forestall compliance with the Brown decision. During the summer of 1957, the state legislature approved a measure that allowed local schools to collect tuition for students who attended a school without living in that school district. The law permitted whites who lived in racially diverse neighborhoods to transfer to an all-white or majority white district for a fee. State lawmakers also drafted legislation to allow tax exemptions for dependents who attended private schools. What separated these new laws from earlier statutes was that a school district could technically desegregate under court order and still operate as single race institutions. Lawmakers reasoned that, if all of the white students transferred voluntarily to a private school or to a district that was not under court order, the state would not be in violation of the court’s verdict. Unlike previous proposals, this solution did not call for public school closure in the event of a desegregation order.20

These kinds of official endorsements of segregated private education were key indicators that state legislators and bureaucratic officers knew that the federal courts were going to order South Carolina to desegregate its public school system in the near future. For example, when former University of South Carolina President Donald Russell launched his campaign for governor in 1958, he called for the state to implement a system of grants to help students pay tuition at private schools. “Unless the whole concept of private education is to be voided by a headstrong Supreme Court,” he declared, “the court could not invalidate under the Constitution such a system.”

According to Russell, the state would provide the grants directly to students, and would not discriminate based on race. Since black students would also be eligible for private school grants, Russell concluded that the new system would pass any constitutional tests. Of course, being eligible for the grant would not assure admission to an all-white private school.  

Even within the Gressette Committee, which was made up of some the state’s most stalwart supporters of segregation, differences over tactics began to emerge. In October 1958, state legislator Sam Harrell demonstrated that there was an ongoing debate over the state’s preferred strategies for preventing desegregation when he criticized the Gressette Committee for not doing more to establish a system of private schools in South Carolina. In its fall report, the committee “concluded that there is no need for further action on the part of the state of South Carolina at this time.” Harrell was among those convinced that the federal courts would soon order the state to desegregate, and urged the committee to “do something to set up private schools before the courts act – the time is now.”

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insisted that the General Assembly abolish the Gressette Committee and establish another group that “will do something.” According to Harrell, Gressette’s committee had not “done one thing for the people of South Carolina and there’s plenty to be done.” The fact that the committee did not respond and went about the slow process of placing bureaucratic roadblocks in front of integrationists was itself evidence that many of the state’s white leaders had abandoned militant and absolute massive resistance for a more effective, but less dogmatic response.22

In addition to concerns such as Harrell’s that the state legislature was moving away from the most militant forms of massive resistance, there was also evidence that some rank and file white South Carolinians were upset at the unwillingness of many of their counterparts to follow through with threats to close desegregated public schools. The pastor of the Duncan Baptist Church in Spartanburg, for instance, urged his congregation to do what state leaders had not and establish a private school system for their children. “Christian integrationists, politicians, the NAACP and the Klan are all busy doing something about the problem,” said Reverend B. Philip Martin. He encouraged “Christian segregationists” to join in the fight to preserve segregated education.

Likewise, the Kershaw County Farm Bureau, which was also frustrated by the lack of official action toward the creation of private schools, voted unanimously to ask the General Assembly to give “serious consideration” to abandoning the public school system in favor of a private one.23

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22 *Southern School News* (November 1958) 5.

The Charleston *News and Courier*, which had always been suspicious of public education, also called on South Carolina to forsake state funded schooling. It warned that “South Carolina hasn’t unlimited time in which to prepare for the day when the federal courts put the communities of this state in a vise and begin to tighten down.” “If taxes were cut,” the paper’s editors reasoned, “citizens would have money to create a private school system.” The newspaper called for tax cuts for “individuals and corporations” who contributed to private education. According to the *News and Courier*, any effort to construct a new system of private schools would have to involve “private action – not legislative action,” in order to assure that the new schools did not fall under the jurisdiction of the federal courts.24

Nonetheless, even the most diehard white supremacists understood that creating a private school system from scratch was a daunting endeavor. For example, even after Thomas H. Carter, Director for the Seven Citizens’ Councils of Charleston County, concluded that the desegregation of county schools was no longer a matter of if, but of “when that day is forced upon us,” he and his organization found it impossible to secure the necessary funding and organizational infrastructure to make their plans a reality. In a WCC newsletter, Carter confessed, “Others will have to solve the problem of student transportation and the manner of financing our private educational system.”25

These kinds of funding and organizational concerns had a dramatic effect on white resisters across the state. Early in South Carolina’s massive resistance campaign, hardcore segregationists felt that, if the state closed its schools in response to a federal

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24 *News and Courier* (December 2, 1958) 4.

25 Thomas H. Carter, untitled newsletter (March 12, 1959), Workman Papers, MPC.
desegregation order, mainstream whites would have no choice but to help build a private system. By the late 1950s, however, even the most intractable massive resisters began to recognize that a significant number of whites would oppose school closure. That realization caused many militant white segregationists to alter their strategy in order to avoid alienating their more moderate neighbors. Instead of abandoning and replacing the public school system as some had suggested, most hardcore whites began to advocate the creation of an alternative that would co-exist with the public education system. Even the most diehard proponents of militant white resistance realized that any private school system would require

This decision to focus less on defiance and more on creating segregated alternatives to the public school system was encouraged by the emergence of a small but vocal community of opponents to hardcore resistance. Racial liberals like John Bolt Culbertson, a former member of the South Carolina House of Representatives and an attorney who had fought for the right of African Americans to serve on juries in Jasper County, understood the weakness of the hardcore position and urged South Carolinians to comply with the Brown decision. “The White Citizens Councils and the Ku Klux Klan have reached their peak,” he declared, “I think they realize that in spite of everything they do, the South is part of the United States and federal laws will prevail.” Although they were concerned over renewed efforts to energize the forces of uncompromising resistance, the moderate members of the Southern Regional Council also felt that by early 1957 the “flame” or white resistance had began to “smolder.” Unlike Culbertson,
however, most of South Carolina’s contingent to SRC spent more time equivocating over the pace of change than working toward meaningful compliance.\textsuperscript{26}

Other observers also took note the declining influence of diehard resistance in South Carolina. In March 1957, the Rock Hill \textit{Evening Herald} reported that the area’s Ku Klux Klan was riddled with dissent and that the various disagreements amongst Klan leaders had hampered KKK recruitment. Additionally, state lawmakers had added to the Klan’s woes by introducing legislation directed at limiting the Klan’s ability to recruit young members. Although the new law, which prohibited minors from joining such organizations, was of limited practical effect, it was an indication of the strong anti-Klan sentiment in the General Assembly. Moreover, Jack O’Dowd of the \textit{Florence Morning News} compared the infamous “Segregation Session” to “McCarthyism,” the Walterboro \textit{Press and Standard} accused state politicians of “cashing in” on the segregation issue rather than finding a legal and peaceful way to preserve segregation, and the \textit{Columbia Record} questioned the state’s ability to enforce statutes that criminalized the NAACP, since the NAACP could simply be replaced by another, similar organization.\textsuperscript{27}

In addition to the growing chorus of criticisms directed at uncompromising resistance, it also became clear by the late 1950s that whites would not abandon or shun every public figure who endorsed some measure of compliance with the federal desegregation orders. This inclination was most apparent during the controversy that erupted when, in October 1958, Governor Timmerman refused to allow evangelical

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Southern School News} (January 1957) 3. Rebecca Reid to Harold C. Fleming (February 3, 1957), Papers of the Southern Regional Council, Microfilm Edition, Reel 146.

minister Billy Graham to hold a rally at the state capitol. “Billy Graham is well known for his support of the program to mix the races in the South,” claimed Timmerman. The governor accused the minister of causing “much harm” to the South. He argued that allowing the rally would be a violation of the separation of church and state, and declared:

I cannot remain silent. Already the program to mix the races in the South has brought heartbreak and suffering to countless numbers of parents, both white and Negro. It also has brought racial tensions to areas where peace, understanding and goodwill formally prevailed.28

Many South Carolinians, however, seem to have disagreed vehemently with their governor’s decision. Graham’s rally was, instead, held on federal property at Fort Jackson. Former Governor Byrnes and Columbia Mayor Lester Bates attended, as did over 60,000 other South Carolinians. Before the rally, Graham chastised the governor and criticized hardcore segregationists. “Some have been so unbalanced on the whole issue that segregation or integration has become their one Gospel,” said Graham, “God pity us if we let our differences about this prevent us from presenting Christ to a lost world.”29

Perhaps the most vivid demonstration of the post-1957 breakdown of South Carolina’s massive resistance movement, however, was the rapid decline of the White Citizens’ Councils. After peaking at between 40,000 and 60,000 members in 1956 and 1957, the organization nearly faded into nonexistence in the state by 1960. S.E. Rogers

28 *Southern School News* (November 1958) 5.
retired from the WCC in 1956 and Jenkins followed a year later. During this period of unstable leadership outbreaks of violence and rumors of Klan infiltration of the WCC plagued the organization. For instance, after journalist William Workman reported rumors that Klan members were attempting to take over the Sumter Citizens’ Council, a group of WCC members called for an immediate response from ACCSC leader Baxter Graham. Graham declined “to disavow any Klan connection.” The dispute eventually led the Sumter group to leave the ACCSC.  

In retrospect, the decline of the WCC movement in South Carolina was perhaps predictable. From its inception, many of the leaders of the South Carolina Councils were divided over tactics. These differences combined with the lack of clear plan and an inability to exhibit political power on the state level to convince many whites that Council membership was unnecessary and unproductive. In July 1958, the Charleston News and Courier declared that the organization was on a “siesta.” Several abortive efforts to renew support for the Councils characterized the next few years, but, for the most part, the ACCSC’s main activity was inactivity. By 1963, Council membership had declined to less than 1,000 members in the state. Farley Smith argued, "When the council was first organized, thousands of persons flocked to join because of the emotional appeal to be in an organization that was doing something." Once people realized that the goals of the organization did not require a large membership, numbers declined to a manageable level, according to Smith. Instead of a mass movement, the Citizens' Councils had become a small group of true believers who published pro-segregation

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propaganda in an attempt to sway public opinion. Workman later recalled that the Councils “ultimately dwindled” because of “a lack of opportunity to do anything because of the constant stepping up of the Federal pressures and the unwillingness of South Carolinians to assert themselves with a force or violence against Federal mandate.”

Elected officials were well aware of the ACCSC’s rapid decline, and, by 1957, were not afraid to disagree with the organization in matters of race. In the spring of 1957, a number of Citizens’ Council members protested the presence of African Americans at Brookgreen Gardens, a popular tourist spot south of Myrtle Beach. B.T. Matthews wrote to State Representative Harrell to complain about the “throng of negroes (sic)” at the park. According to Matthews, it was “very embarrassing to walk around, a negro in front, one in back, and if you weren’t careful they would walk right side of you, your wife or friends.” He was appalled that the African American patrons “acted as if you were black too.”

Even Council supporters, such as Workman, openly disagreed with WCC leaders over how best to address the “race-mingling” issue at Brookgreen Gardens. For example, new ACCSC Chairman Thomas D. Keels charged that the popular vacation spot was promoting “race mixing” by admitting both black and white races, but was unable to stir enough publicity or outrage to attract any meaningful attention to his cause. State Senator L. Marion Gressette informed Keels that the state had no control over the private gardens. He urged Keels to organize a boycott against race mixing at Brookgreen. Keels


32 B.T. Matthews to George Sam Harrell (April 29, 1957), copy in the Workman Papers, MPC.
then turned to *News and Courier* capital correspondent William Workman to create publicity about the problem. Keels told Workman, “The trouble with Senator Gressette’s suggestion . . . is that there are so few people that know of conditions” at the gardens. He implored Workman to write about the problem. The newspaperman responded by urging Keels to “ignore” the issue. “Any publicity,” said Workman, “. . . will simply call the attention of other Negro groups the availability of a private recreational area which they likely will then begin to patronize in large numbers.”

Predictably, the rapid decline of the ACCSC further emboldened a few moderate whites to challenge hardcore segregationists and call for a more constructive dialogue between white South Carolinians and their black neighbors. For instance, Dew James, a white student at the University of South Carolina, wrote in the student newspaper, *The Gamecock*, that the pro-segregation legislation passed by the General Assembly had “succeeded in widening the gap of misunderstanding between the whites and the Negroes.”

This small wave of moderation was especially noticeable in South Carolina’s white churches. Across the state religious leaders began to call for a more reasonable and less confrontational approach to racial issues. A moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, for example, told an Olanta audience that “the solution to the race problem rests in communication between leaders of both white and colored men,” and, in August 1957, the South Carolina Methodist Conference accepted a change that allowed

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33 T.D. Keels to L. Marion Gressette, Chairman of the South Carolina Segregation Committee, (May 6, 1957) and Gressette to Keels, (May 24, 1957). T.D. Keels to W.D. Workman, (June 12, 1957) and Workman to Keels, (June 18, 1957), Workman Papers, MPC.

black and white churches to affiliate with one another for first time. The alteration of SCMC regulations was ridiculed by more conservative members of the organization, but the resolution eventually passed by a vote of 287 to 261. Soon after the SCMC also rejected, by a vote of 258 to 124, a measure demanding that the national church withdraw from the National Council of Churches to protest the NCC’s endorsement of desegregation. In the end, these narrow victories, which often pitted professional clergy and upstate congregations against their black belt brethren, represented the emergence of a moderate voice that had (with rare exception) been drowned out by hardcore segregationists in the immediate aftermath of the Brown decision.35

Education professionals also joined this new chorus of small but dedicated moderates in calling for an end to the crudest forms of massive resistance in South Carolina. Dr. L.P. Hollis, a retired school superintendent from Greenville County who had served on the committee charged with equalizing the state’s segregated school system, called on whites and blacks to “establish the lines of communication between the two races.” Hollis declared that the educational progress exhibited by African Americans following the Civil War was “nothing short of marvelous.” He also called for blacks to become more involved in the political process and in the state’s education system. During the spring of 1958, one Spartanburg County teacher challenged South Carolina’s endorsement of massive resistance legislation and called on the General Assembly to reinstate the compulsory attendance law. The law became a particular point of contention between lawmakers and educators when Lee O. Gaskins wrote in the Journal of the International Association of Pupil Personnel Workers that the repeal of the law had led to

35 Ibid.
a dramatic increase in truancy among 12 to 16 year olds. Although he refused to call on the South Carolina legislature to make school mandatory for the state’s children, one high ranking official in the South Carolina Department of Education agreed that a compulsory attendance law was “desirable.”

Many African Americans were skeptical of these new calls for interracial cooperation. For years white segregationists had called for interracial dialogue, but refused to endorse any desegregation as part of those discussions. These new calls for white moderation, however, were in stark contrast to the nearly unchecked hardcore resistance that was exemplified by the “Segregation Session” and were therefore generally welcomed by African American professionals as signs of progress. Dr. Thomas C. McFall, whose appointment to a physicians group had become a campaign issue in the Democratic Primary for United States Senator in 1950, was especially supportive of white calls for interracial cooperation in South Carolina. McFall, who was named to the State Advisory Committee for the United States Civil Rights Commission, pledged to “serve, along with other members of the committee, in investigating in a just and impartial manner those unconstitutional acts” brought to the attention of the Civil Rights Commission. However, McFall also pledged to be “always considerate . . . of the rights of all individuals to their personal feelings and opinions.”

In addition to the decline of the Councils and flickering signs of tentative interracial cooperation there were numerous other indicators that by 1958 the state’s white population was more interested in limiting the extent and impact of desegregation than in

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36 Southern School News (May 1958) 11, (June 1958) 15.

37 Thomas C. McFall to William D. Workman (September 24, 1958), Workman Papers, MPC.
mounting a futile challenge to federal authority. *Southern School News* reported that “The General Assembly convened for the 1958 session without very much stress on segregation.” Likewise, when Citizens’ Council leader and Charleston attorney Hans F. Paul attempted to use the clout of the WCC to pressure South Carolina’s congressional delegation, Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn dismissed Paul’s accusation that, with the exception of Senator Thurmond, the state’s representatives had failed to provide enough support to Council efforts to save *de jure* segregation. According to Dorn, it was pointless to introduce “legislation that cannot possibly be passed,” or legislation that would “prejudice more people against” the South. Dorn argued that the only way for the state’s segregationists to circumvent federally enforced desegregation was to avoid “saying things publicly which will harm our cause among the members of Congress from other states.” The congressman pointed out that, to minimize civil rights legislation, the region would need “friends in Congress from other sections, and that can only be obtained by positive, quiet, determined courtship.” He warned Paul that South Carolina’s leaders should avoid being “branded as cheap demagogues.”

In a letter to Johnston School Superintendent Charles Lockwood, Dorn seemed even more resigned to token desegregation. The congressman warned that the South was “simply outnumbered in Congress.” He noted that “the Supreme Court and the President” were opposed to segregation, and that “at least three out of five Congressmen and Senators” opposed southern efforts to defend the racial caste system. Rather than endorse a recommitment to defending Jim Crow, Dorn worried that unchecked

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demagoguery would weaken the case for segregation and drive away potential legislative allies who might help delay or limit the effectiveness of federal civil rights enforcement.39

Dorn and other likeminded whites recognized that throughout the South the social barriers between whites and blacks were eroding under the combined might of black activism and federal pressure. He understood that the politics of massive resistance filled the emotional need of white segregationists to protest, but he also appreciated that the tactics of hardcore segregationists were based on a misunderstanding of the realities of the situation. Quite simply, the federal government had the power to enforce a desegregation ruling whenever it chose to do so. Given the unrelenting calls for equality emanating from civil rights advocates across the nation, such action seemed more and more likely with each passing year. Moreover, if a controversy, such as the Emmett Till murder, the Autherine Lucy incident, or the Little Rock confrontation erupted in South Carolina it would bring unwanted national attention and limit the state’s ability to entice public and private investment in the South Carolina economy. Many whites realized that South Carolina’s best option for maintaining white privilege was to avoid this kind of scrutiny whenever possible.

Everywhere in South Carolina the writing was on the wall for proponents of uncompromising massive resistance. James McBride Dabbs, of the Southern Regional Council, sent a letter to the editor to the News and Courier in which he encouraged whites to accept the inevitable. Though Dabbs was atypical of white South Carolinians, he did sense that whites were beginning to recognize the futility of hardcore resistance.

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39 William Jennings Bryan Dorn to Charles M. Lockwood (February 13, 1956), Dorn Papers, MPC.
“It would pay us to recognize the realities,” wrote Dabbs, “not only of politics but also of morality.” According to Dabbs, “Gettysburg was gallant though hopeless. Segregation is merely hopeless.”

By the late 1950s the South Carolina General Assembly seemed disinterested in calling for regional unity or participating in the various intimidation campaigns that typified other parts of the Deep South. When state Representative Hart sponsored a resolution condemning the federal government’s use of force in Little Rock, less than 30 members of the South Carolina House of Representatives even bothered to vote. The measure passed by 15 to six, and was then approved by the state senate with little fanfare. Even South Carolina’s Committee to Investigate Communist Activities seemed impotent. The committee, which was chaired by moderate State Senator John West, issued numerous reports, but was largely inactive for most of its existence. One study of the committee found that “its reports for the next five years indicate that no new legislation was considered necessary to battle communism in South Carolina.” Historian Joyce Johnston argues that “The quiet creation of the committee” and its general lack of activity “indicate that the public and legislature in South Carolina were, from the start, not so much enthusiastic about the Committee as they were not opposed to its existence.”

Dr. Joseph Margolis, a professor at the University of South Carolina, reasoned in the winter of 1957-58 that the “resistance of the South is not wholehearted resistance.” According to Margolis, by 1958, whites were “not hopeful” that they could halt the process of desegregation. He concluded that:

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40 Southern School News (August 1958) 5.

“The southern segregationist can find answers for the inexplicable plight of the Negro only in unreasonable mouthings about racial inferiority and contradictory testimony of the ingratitude, disease, stupidity, childishness, arrogance, viciousness, irresponsibility, contentedness, well-being, cunning of the Negro. 42

These signs of changes in the dominant tactics of South Carolina’s white resistance movement, did not, however, signal an acceptance of court ordered desegregation. Margolis, for instance, was not invited back to the University of South Carolina the following year despite the perceived thaw in race relations. Most white South Carolinians may have agreed with Margolis’s assessment, but few were willing to admit defeat in their fight to preserve white supremacy. The majority of white South Carolinians found his comments objectionable because they still hoped that there was time to limit desegregation. Any hint that South Carolina was resigned to desegregation, they reasoned, would generate more support in the federal government for rapid and sweeping racial change. White South Carolinians understood that, so long as federal authorities were worried about out-of-control violence and widespread resistance, the national government would continue to equivocate on the best course of action. In the late 1950s, federal regulators had not yet determined whether or not their involvement would generate more social disorder than the current policy of limited entanglement in the southern race problem. Nonetheless, it was becoming more difficult for South Carolina’s white leadership to hold together a large enough coalition of whites to maintain the illusion of white unity and hardcore resisters worried that the appearance of

a weakened white resolve would serve as an invitation for a more pro-active federal policy. 43

By the late 1950s, even the state’s most diehard segregationists began to recognize the fragility of the white pro-segregationist coalition. Slight alterations in the dogmatic rhetoric of hardcore white supremacists were early indications that they were fearful of alienating mainstream whites in South Carolina’s urban areas. No state official was more demagogic in matters of race than Timmerman who had proclaimed that his state could not be bribed into accepting compliance with the Brown order. However, even Timmerman, who had assailed federal education funding as “sugar coated federal taxation” and who had claimed that South Carolina would forego congressionally allocated monies if they came with a desegregation requirement, was not actually willing to reject all additional funding from the federal government. Instead, he, and many other hardcore segregationists, balanced their attacks on federal aid with calls for bloc grants and other forms of “no-strings attached” funding. State leaders also promised that the rejection of federal education funding would not impact other forms of congressional spending in South Carolina. 44

Timmerman, who had supported nearly every massive resistance law proposed by the General Assembly, later refused to call a special session of the South Carolina legislature during the summer of 1957. After the Fourth Circuit Court struck down Virginia’s pupil placement law, the delegation from Union County asked the governor to order the session so that South Carolina could rewrite its placement law, which was very

43 Southern School News (May 1958) 11.
similar to the Virginia statute. Timmerman refused and declared, rather misleadingly, that the two laws were actually quite dissimilar. It was likely that Timmerman and other state leaders did not want to raise the ire of federal investigators by making a very public effort to avoid compliance with the Fourth Circuit Court’s ruling in a special legislative session. After all, South Carolina’s effort to re-write state election laws after the *Smith v. Allwright* decision had led to a successful legal challenge from the South Carolina NAACP.45

Even Timmerman understood that, although attacks on federal intervention were still popular among South Carolina whites, most South Carolinians were hesitant to call for the outright rejection of federal involvement in the state. Aside from drawing unwanted attention, such assaults on federal authority threatened to weaken the state’s fiscal health. The South Carolina Conference on Education, which was formed by Governor Byrnes, testified that most of the state’s schools could do without the additional monies, but the group’s study did not include the area surrounding the Charleston Navy Base or Aiken, where the Savannah River Nuclear Facility was located. Moreover, the state ranked in the lowest third in nearly every education category when compared to the other states. Thus, it was clear to many that South Carolina’s education system did need every available resource to improve its schools. Furthermore, the impact of federal spending on wages and infrastructure was obvious in much of the state. The *Anderson Independent* even noted that it was absurd for state leaders to oppose federal taxes for

\[45\textit{Ibid.}\]
building schools when tax dollars from the national treasury continued to flow into South Carolina’s defense industries.\textsuperscript{46}

The specter of losing federal funding was especially troubling for school districts in South Carolina’s black belt that were already having difficulty maintaining the state mandated dual school system. Thomas A. Carrere, the director of instruction for Charleston city schools, pointed out that, in the 1956-57 school year, 65 percent of the pupils enrolled in the city’s public schools were African American. According to Carrere, white migration to Charleston’s suburbs had made operating whites only schools in the city enormously expensive. Whites-only elementary schools in the city of Charleston, for example, had lost over 200 students in a single school year. By the late 1950s, many of the white schools were barely occupied while the city's African American institutions were severely overcrowded. Some black schools were even forced to hold double sessions to alleviate overcrowding during a period when there were 17 unused classrooms in the whites-only schools. In 1958, city officials had to change the new Courtenay Elementary from a whites-only school to an African American one, but the change did little to help the overburdened schools system.\textsuperscript{47}

In a sign of the persistence of white racism – even within the somewhat differently configured resistance of the late 1950s – state leaders refused to acknowledge these fiscal constraints and declined to concede that they had already sacrificed minimal compliance for federal money throughout the state. For instance, Timmerman ignored the positive


economic impact that the desegregated military had had on South Carolina during his
tenure, but did not hesitate to blame a nationwide shortfall in military recruits on
desegregation in the armed forces. He proclaimed, “There are few young men of ability
who would voluntarily choose racial mixing in our armed forces.” He derided military
training facilities as “sociological camps for compulsory racial mixing.” It is noteworthy
that the governor did not specifically mention Fort Jackson. His remarks were endorsed
by former General Mark Clark who told *U.S. News and World Report* that African
American soldiers performed poorly during World War II, and that integration could
jeopardize the nation’s ability to defend itself. Like Timmerman, however, Clark
decided to discuss the positive economic effect of military spending in his home town of
Charleston.48

Unlike Timmerman and Clark, federal officials and more moderate whites
considered the desegregation of the military a success. By the summer of 1955, the
Secretary of Defense had declared the desegregation of the armed forces complete. Most
white leaders understood that these changes made the issue of federal money more
complicated, but publicly downplayed the impact of desegregated military bases in South
Carolina. Privately, however, many white South Carolinians wrestled with the dilemma
posed by federal funding and gradually altered their opinions regarding hardcore
resistance. James McBride Dabbs observed:

> We mingle with Negroes at games on government reservations because
> enforcement there is taken out of our hands: we are on federal property, we have
> no responsibility. Take Shaw Air Force Base, near Sumter, South Carolina, where
> at integrated athletic contests white citizens’ council leaders may be seen sitting by
> Negroes and chatting with them. But when they come away from the Base and

News* (June 1956) 14.
back downtown they assume again, with sober faces, the policeman’s role. A part of the South’s present excitement over maintaining segregation is due to the fact that it senses how little it really cares, and is trying to whip up enthusiasm for an attitude no longer deeply believed in.\(^{49}\)

Although Dabbs was over-optimistic about the racial conditions on desegregated military bases, the fact that local whites continued to frequent on-base events and rarely protested federal efforts to desegregate military installations is evidence that, when they were given no choice in the matter, most whites were more likely to confront desegregation with annoyed resignation than calls for secession. For this reason, hardcore segregationists worried that a discussion of desegregation on military bases would demonstrate the success of minimal compliance in desegregating without altering the racial power structure. In the first few years after the Brown decision, civil rights leaders were often willing to accept token desegregation as a first step toward gradual integration. During the height of massive resistance, hardcore segregationists ridiculed tokenism as simply another term for integration. However, they all but ignored military desegregation, which demonstrated both the success and limits of federally enforced minimal compliance.

For all of the “successes” of desegregation in the military, the racial hierarchy had changed little in the 10 years after Truman’s executive order to desegregate. At the Charleston Naval Shipyards, for example, African Americans made up almost 40 percent of the workforce, the facility had desegregated lunch rooms and restrooms, and it afforded African American employees the same civil service protections as it granted to white workers. Nonetheless, blacks were mostly limited to menial jobs. Less than 10

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African Americans held supervisory positions at the base in the late 1950s and only one of the civilian police officers assigned to the base was black.\textsuperscript{50}

African Americans in Charleston’s other federal offices did even worse. Only two black workers were employed at the Headquarters of the Sixth Naval District, which was located in the city. One was a mimeograph operator and the other was a janitor. The federal customs house on East Bay Street did not have a single African American employee, the Charleston Internal Revenue Service office did not employ blacks as anything other than janitors and none of the federal judicial offices had a single African American employee. Even the Charleston Post Office, which had a number of black mailmen and several African American clerks, did not have one black supervisor.\textsuperscript{51}

The desegregation of South Carolina’s military bases was at one level a progressive measure; on another level it actually demonstrated to some whites the probability of protecting the basic structure of unequal racial relations while simultaneously allowing for minimal compliance. Yet, hardcore segregationists refused to accept that this might serve as a model for minimizing the effects of other desegregation measures. Despite the persistence of racial inequality in South Carolina’s education system and its federal employment rolls, the desegregation of the military and the legally mandated civil service protections that federal employees enjoyed did give some African Americans the opportunity to challenge \textit{de jure} segregation with less fear of local intimidation. Militant racists found this unacceptable and worried that these safeguards would eventually

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 245.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 245-247.
undermine white privilege by giving black federal workers the ability to take their cases to sympathetic authorities outside of the South.

Of course, after Eisenhower’s use of force in Little Rock, South Carolina’s most diehard segregationists were also worried about the possibility that a desegregated military might be charged with the responsibility of enforcing a desegregation order. Southerners were well aware that the only state force large enough to prevent a violent episode at a desegregated institution was the National Guard. Timmerman declared that only a state governor could call on the Guard. Therefore, according to the governor, the federal courts lacked the ability to enforce any desegregation order without the assistance of the state executive.52

In fact, diehard segregationists often pointed to the fact that, after an initial period of tokenism, some federal agencies had began to promote the concept of black advancement in the workplace. After the United States Post Office began advertising that it promoted equal job opportunity, United States Senator Olin Johnston directed the Senate Post Office and Civil Service Committee to begin drafting legislation to prevent the use of postal property for “vicious political propaganda.” According to Johnston, the promise of equal opportunity was little more than an effort to build support in the black community for Richard Nixon before the next presidential election.53

Johnston, however, realized that black ballots were also important to him. Though the number of black voters in South Carolina had been relatively stable throughout the 1950s, the Civil Rights Act of 1957 promised a modest increase in the number of African

52 Southern School News (October 1956) 4.
53 Southern School News (January 1957) 3.
American voters in the coming years. With that in mind, Johnston had pledged privately to support the extension of more civil service jobs to African Americans in exchange for black political support. According to John McCray, Johnston had promised black leaders that, if they encouraged African Americans to vote for him, he would “put every qualified black anywhere in the country” into a federal job. The senator, however, was too politically astute to make his work for black employment a public matter.54

Unlike Johnston, most South Carolina whites were both publicly and privately appalled by any weakening in *de jure* segregation. But, like the senator, they were unwilling to reject federal investment even if it meant relaxing South Carolina’s system of racial controls. For example, even though Senator Thurmond’s record breaking filibuster against the Civil Rights Act of 1957 was widely praised in South Carolina, local officials in Columbia worried that the senator’s efforts would alienate his fellow congressmen and hamper his ability to prevent the closure of Fort Jackson. To them, the economic benefits of the base outweighed its limited effect on racial politics.55

The state witnessed, first hand, the heavy price of rejecting federal funding in 1957 when the Clemson College Board of Trustees turned down a grant for nuclear research at the school. College officials worried that accepting the funds would require the school to accept federal equality opportunity rules. According to Timmerman, accepting the funds required the school to agree that “no person shall be barred from participation in the educational and training program involved or be subject to other unfavorable

54 John McCray, from “South Carolina Voices of the Civil Rights Movement,” transcript (Charleston Museum, Charleston, S.C., November 5-6, 1982), Avery Research Center, College of Charleston [Hereafter cited as “Voices. . . .” transcript, Avery]. Johnston had a long history of secretly working with African American leaders to garner black ballots. John Sproat discusses the level of “secret” negotiations conducted between white and black leaders in “Firm Flexibility.”

discrimination on the basis of race, creed, or religion.” The loss of the grant cost Clemson over $400,000. More importantly, it was evidence that, if the state refused to comply with federal court orders regarding segregation, it risked losing an important revenue source.56

By 1958, these kinds of financial and electoral concerns led some state leaders publicly to back away from threats to abandon the public school system or to reject federal investment. A new generation of leaders emerged who were still pro-segregation, but more flexible in their approach to the difficult issue. Donald Russell, who had resigned his position as the president of the University of South Carolina to run for governor told a meeting of the Horry County Citizens’ Council that the maintenance of segregation was the state’s “duty to youth and nation.” Likewise, his leading opponent, Lieutenant Governor Ernest “Fritz” Hollings, also endorsed segregation at an open meeting in Columbia. Yet, neither candidate was an advocate of closing the public school system. Hollings had championed public schools for over a decade as a legislator and Lieutenant Governor, and Russell was a professional educator who recognized the relationship between a strong education system and a strong economy. In the next few years this new generation of politicians would develop a more adaptable but no less determined approach to preserving the greatest feasible amount of segregation and for maintaining the fundamental architecture of white privilege. They would do this by shifting the focal point of segregationist efforts from uncompromising massive resistance to managed (non)compliance with desegregation ordinances.57

56 Southern School News (September 1957) 2.

During the summer of 1957, the United States Congress established a commission to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the American Civil War. The Civil War Centennial Commission (CWCC) was hailed as a way to project national unity and foster economic development. Southern business leaders hoped that the centennial celebration would help the region capitalize on an increase in heritage-based tourism and therefore scheduled celebrations throughout the South over the course of several years. Although each observance was dominated by local interests, CWCC planning and federal funding promised to make the events a success. Organizers attempted to focus the public’s attention on the gallantry of Civil War soldiers and on the nation’s success in rising from the ashes of its bloodiest and deadliest war. At the same time, they downplayed the racial aspects of the sectional crisis and refused to draw parallels between the war and the dominance of the segregation issue during the middle of the twentieth century.¹

Extricating race from the celebration, however, proved impossible during the CWCC’s annual meeting in April 1961. Organizers decided to hold the meeting in Charleston, South Carolina so that it would coincide with the 100 year anniversary of the bombardment of Fort Sumter. The decision was not controversial until the segregated Francis Marion Hotel on King Street refused to accommodate an African American

member of the New Jersey CWCC delegation. After Centennial officials refused to intervene in the matter, New Jersey and several other northern delegations protested and the matter became a national news story. The public embarrassment forced the Kennedy Administration to act and the CWCC meeting was moved to the desegregated Charleston Navy Base.  

South Carolina officials lambasted the CWCC, President Kennedy, and the members of the New Jersey delegation. South Carolina Governor Ernest F. Hollings and several other state leaders accused northern politicians of stirring up controversy in South Carolina to score political victories at home. In the end, the state went forth with its own segregated celebration by re-enacting the April 1861 attack on Fort Sumter, while the desegregated CWCC meeting was held on federal property at the navy base a few miles away. 

The Civil War Centennial controversy highlighted many aspects of the battle over desegregation in the South Carolina. By the early 1960s most white South Carolinians were no longer determined to combat any and all affronts to southern racial customs. Instead, white leaders opted to choose their battles carefully in order to maintain the maximum feasible amount of segregation. In the first decade after the initial Briggs case whites had learned that the state simply could not withstand every pressure to relax its rigid Jim Crow regulations. In the case of the centennial, South Carolinians were once again reminded that external pressures could have a dramatic effect on two of the most important aspects of the state’s economy: tourism and federal defense spending.

\[^2\text{Ibid.}\]

\[^3\text{Ibid.}\]
By the time of the 100 year anniversary of the attack on Fort Sumter, only Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina had completely avoided any desegregation of public schools. A federal court had ordered schools in Charlottesville, Front Royal, and Norfolk, Virginia and Little Rock, Arkansas to reopen after state leaders chose to close them rather than desegregate and the direct action phase of the civil rights movement was gathering momentum with a spate of sit-ins, freedom rides, and boycotts across the region. For elected officials in South Carolina the proverbial writing on the wall had never been clearer: the civil rights movement was intensifying and at some point in the very near future, the federal government was going to force desegregation in South Carolina’s public schools. However, even as late as 1961, it was still unclear where federal officials were going to set the bar of compliance. The manner in which white South Carolinians approached this uncertainty and the mechanisms that they developed to limit black progress are the principle themes of this chapter. Although in some regards, the state became more accommodating of black civil rights in the 1960s, this chapter reveals the continued tenacity and, to a large degree effectiveness, of new, more sophisticated modes of white resistance during this period of apparent racial change.

As has been noted, the changes that were sweeping across the South, especially in the border states, coupled with changing circumstances within South Carolina had begun to take their toll on support for hardcore white resistance in South Carolina as early as 1956. The defeat of the legal and bureaucratic forms of massive resistance in Virginia and Arkansas may not have signaled the end of the fight to preserve *de jure* segregation, but it was certainly a terminal diagnosis. By the late 1950s, southern whites were left with limited choices: they could force a showdown with federal authorities and test the
limits of Washington’s commitment to civil rights enforcement, they could escalate the use violent intimidation and economic reprisals against African Americans, they could simply allow legalized racial separation to crumble, or they could adapt their resistance tactics to preserve as much white privilege as possible without directly challenging federally enforced desegregation.

To white South Carolinians none of these choices seemed ideal. Most of the state’s white population wholeheartedly believed in segregated education, but very few whites were willing to jeopardize the social or economic stability of the state to defend every single segregated school seat to the bitter end. As had been the case for the entire post-World War II period of the African American freedom struggle, the position of rank and file whites was complex and often contradictory. State leaders were charged with the difficult task of devising a policy to satisfy whites who did not want a showdown with federal authorities, or civil unrest, or equality for African Americans.

Given the paucity of viable choices available to white segregationists, South Carolina’s state government shifted its agenda from preventing any desegregation to delaying and minimizing any meaningful integration. Under the direction of newly elected Governor Hollings, the tenor, as well as the goals, of white resistance changed significantly after 1958. In order to maintain unity in the white communities, Hollings and other state leaders made the preservation of civic order the hallmark of South Carolina’s official policy regarding segregation. To quiet criticisms from the most hardcore segregationists, state leaders such as Hollings, L. Marion Gressette, David W. Robinson, and Chief of the State Law Enforcement Division J.P. Strom, promised to force civil rights activists to work through a complicated array of legal obstacles and
diversions to achieve even limited desegregation. While conceding that some might succeed in navigating these obstacles, these leaders held out the prospect of a calm, peaceful environment in which economic development could flourish and the essential patterns of white privilege would remain intact.4

Like his predecessor, George Bell Timmerman, Jr., Hollings publicly promised to preserve segregation. Unlike Timmerman, however, Hollings balanced his efforts to preserve racial separation with a promise to respect the law. In his inaugural address, Hollings derided the Supreme Court for its “unconstitutional” ruling in the Brown case and pledged to undo the court’s decision. “There is no law and provision of the Constitution requiring racially integrated schools,” said Hollings. “I cannot conscientiously take this oath to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States,” he declared, “and not object to the Supreme Court usurping the amendatory power that constitutionally is vested in three-fourths of the states.” Nevertheless, the new governor also proclaimed, “We are a law-abiding people and will not stand for violence against our churches and schools.”5

Hollings, like other mainstream segregationists, was appalled at the wave of violence that engulfed South Carolina in the first three and a half years after the Brown ruling. The governor, new Attorney General Daniel R. McLeod, and various other state leaders were determined to maintain public order and were often as suspicious of working class white violence as they were of civil rights activism. Shortly after his


5 Southern School News (February 1959) 8.
inauguration, Hollings promised to work with McLeod for stronger laws against bomb threats and bomb violence. During the first few days of the legislative session of 1959 Lexington County Representative Ryan C. Shealy introduced legislation that made life imprisonment mandatory for anyone convicted of bombing a church or school in South Carolina and the judiciary committees in both houses of the General Assembly began working on Hollings’s anti-bomb threat legislation.\(^6\)

This changing political dynamic hastened the evolution of both black activism and white resistance in South Carolina. Hollings and other white elites recognized that the creeping desegregation of the border-states would soon reach the Deep South, and began to view tokenism and minimal compliance as important resistance tactics. They did not support desegregation so much as they had a genuine desire both to avoid a violent racial confrontation and to evade federal scrutiny. African Americans, on the other hand, had made it perfectly clear that they intended to fight for civil rights in South Carolina. Therefore, some politicians, such as Columbia Mayor Lester Bates, wanted to work with black leaders to minimize public disturbances. Unofficial meetings were held with black leaders in all of South Carolina’s major cities, except Charleston. Negotiations, however, were difficult, not the least because for over a decade, the state of South Carolina had adopted the position that the state’s largest African American advocacy group, the NAACP, was a “foreign” and “subversive” organization.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) *Southern School News* (February 1959) 8.

For most of the state’s white population, NAACP membership carried a stigma that had been reinforced by hostile official state policy. During the early months of 1959, however, state leaders began to reconsider the legitimacy of the organization. White politicians in South Carolina felt that the NAACP would be more open to negotiation and compromise on the extent and pace of any desegregation than other, newer, more militant civil rights protest groups, such as the SCLC. Under the direction of Secretary of State O. Frank Thornton, the state finally issued an official charter to the veteran organization. Elected officers promised that the move would help “bring the NAACP within the provisions” of South Carolina law. It would also, according to Thornton, allow the attorney general to “investigate,” and “to examine the books, accounts, records, etc.” of the NAACP. For civil rights activists, recognition was an admission that the state of South Carolina’s attempts to criminalize the NAACP had failed. The previous attorney general, T.C. Callison, had argued that denying a charter to the NAACP would allow the state to hold the Association liable for violations of laws governing “foreign corporations.” The charter was recognition that the NAACP was not “foreign” at all, but comprised of homegrown civil rights advocates.8

This shift, though pronounced and ultimately decisive, was not uncontested. As ever, there were counter currents to the main flow of events. Certainly, there remained a significant number of unrepentant diehard resisters who wanted more anti-integration legislation and were appalled by the NAACP charter. Some white legislators, with widespread support from black belt whites, were outraged that the state would formally recognize what they still perceived as a “subversive” organization. Representative John

8 *Southern School News* (March 1959) 9.
C. Hart of Union County, for example, proposed a resolution condemning the NAACP charter and demanded that the General Assembly instead pass a bill requiring the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) to investigate the organization. However, in a sign that the politics of massive resistance were becoming more subtle, the South Carolina House of Representatives refused to bring Hart’s proposal to a vote. A week later, another proposal from Hart to place restrictions on state charters was buried in a legislative committee.  

Like Hart, some other state lawmakers were also reluctant to abandon the pro-segregation lawmaking that had typified the previous two and a half years. Representative Sam Harrell introduced legislation to require blood banks to label all blood according to the race and sex of the donor and introduced a bill to require South Carolina to sell all public school property and provide tuition grants to help citizens’ pay private school tuition. Representative Floyd D. Spence, of Lexington County, called for a resolution that would disqualify voters who had fathered an “illegitimate child,” and Union County Representative John D. Long declared, “I prefer to see the colored progeny and the white progeny in Union County living in primitive illiteracy than integrate.” Long encouraged the General Assembly not to give up on its fight to preserve Jim Crow and claimed, “We do not have to cover and fawn before bigoted and fanatical zealots trying to cram down our throats a way of life we abhor.”

Most South Carolinians, however, were no longer so willing to adopt such drastic measures to preserve every vestige of the state’s Jim Crow laws. An editorial in the

9 Ibid.
10 *Southern School News* (March 1959) 9.
*Greenville News*, for example, called Harrell’s proposals “ridiculous.” Apparently, most of the state’s lawmakers agreed and his propositions were never passed. Even Hollings softened his stance on the issue while in office. At the annual convention of the all-white South Carolina Education Association in 1959 Governor Hollings urged local leaders to provide more financial support to the public school system, but declined to discuss the segregation crisis at all. According to Hollings, additional funding and a concerted statewide effort was the only way for South Carolina to make up for past failures to educate its children properly in the past. The governor’s commitment to public education and his reluctance to affirm the sanctity of segregation explicitly was another example of the changing tenor of the desegregation debate in South Carolina and an important indicator that hardcore rhetoric was no longer the preferred language of white segregationists.\(^\text{11}\)

Hollings was a political pragmatist. Despite his occasional race baiting, he never seemed fully committed to the use of school closure – one of the most extreme measures in the arsenal of hardcore segregationists – as a resistance tactic. The governor told Emanuel Celler, the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, that he was not “intent on closing public schools. My intent,” he argued, “is exactly the opposite, to keep them open.” According to Hollings, he would only authorize school closure in order to maintain “peace and good order” in South Carolina. He informed Celler and the committee that:

> . . . the main thing is, as we all know, to keep little children from injury. So despite my desire for continued schooling otherwise, and the desire to maintain law and

order, I might – in the idea of keeping law and order – have to close the school, or have to put persons around it.”

Above all other considerations, perhaps, Hollings was determined that South Carolina should handle the desegregation issue on its own terms, without federal involvement. Thus, he promised to adopt a “policy of no cooperation with the Civil Rights Commission,” calling the commission unnecessary and worried that state participation in its “political scheme” would “extend the idea that there is a need and at the same time give substance and support to a commission in violation of fundamental constitutional principles.” According to Hollings, “We have good race relations in South Carolina. We have law and order in South Carolina.” He claimed that the state had “adequate civil rights laws” and promised that “the people know that these laws will be enforced.”

The governor later sent a prepared statement to the commission in which he declared:

In South Carolina, despite some minor setbacks, the races continue to live in peace and harmony with mutual respect. In our schools peace patrols the school corridors; unlike New York, we do not need armed guards. The Negroes of our state feel – as all of us feel – that schools are intended for education and not for integration or social experimentation. The governor may have been convinced that race relations were “good,” but African Americans understood that less confrontational white resistance did not signify an end to the state’s commitment to white supremacy. Hollings may have backed off from the kind of race baiting that typified George Bell Timmerman’s tenure as governor,

12 Southern School News (May 1959) 13.

13 “Statement by Gov. Ernest F. Hollings,” (December 29, 1959), Workman Papers, MPC.

but he was still a segregationist. According to historian Tony Badger, “Hollings set about to educate people in 1962 that change would have to come, and he told newspaper editors that they should prepare their readership for an end to de jure segregation.” Yet, as Badger pointed out, the governor refused to allow local officials to begin formal negotiations with African Americans and remained steadfast in his determination to limit desegregation to a handful students in a small number of schools. Hollings was a proponent of managed non-compliance. That is, he was interested in maintaining the highest level of white privilege within a technically, but minimally, desegregated system. He embodied, the aim of South Carolina’s white leadership in the early 1960s, which was to evade the spirit, if not the letter, of the Brown decision.15

As far as African American leaders were concerned, the most troubling aspect of Hollings’s assessment of race relations in South Carolina was his description of racial harmony and his insistence that the state respected black civil rights. Although their influence was diminished in the era of managed non-compliance, hardcore segregationists remained a powerful constituency and uncompromising white supremacists controlled local political offices in most of the rural black belt counties. Even though the Citizens’ Councils were significantly weaker than during their heyday in 1956 and 1957, organized economic intimidation persisted. Likewise, violations of black voting rights were an unrelenting problem for South Carolina blacks. If, as historian John

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G. Sproat has argued, “the racial temperature began to cool” under the Hollings administration, the difference went unnoticed by many African Americans in South Carolina’s rural black belt counties.16

Black South Carolinians were outraged by Hollings’s rosy characterization of their state. For more than a decade the state’s African American civil rights leaders had challenged the notion that blacks were treated fairly in South Carolina through an array of political and legal assaults to Jim Crow. According to Clarendon County activist Billie Fleming, little had changed since the Supreme Court handed down its verdicts in the two *Brown* decisions. In his testimony before the Senate Committee on Constitutional Rights in 1959 Fleming reported that the intimidation of African Americans was repeatedly sanctioned by state and local authorities. For example, he recalled that, on July 30, 1957, “a Ku Klux Klan caravan parked in front” of his funeral home. According to Fleming, the procession included 28 cars filled with robed Klansmen. “In the sixth car from the front of the caravan,” reported Fleming, “I saw Sheriff T.K. Jackson and one of his deputies in a car bearing his official insignia.”17

In response to Hollings’s testimony before the Senate Committee that South Carolina had committed no civil rights violations, Fleming filed a number of complaints with the Justice Department in late 1959 and early 1960. The NAACP leader from Clarendon County pointed out that there were more than 18,000 African Americans in the county compared to approximately 8,500 whites. Of those 18,000, only 325 blacks were registered to vote compared to over 2,500 white voters. Moreover, he claimed that

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African Americans were denied the opportunity to serve on the Board of Registration. Fleming alleged that blacks were forced to prove property ownership valued at a minimum of 300 dollars and pass a literacy test while whites were not subjected to the same requirements. In his testimony, Fleming emphasized, “The Governor inferred to this Committee that in South Carolina we are all happy with conditions as they are. I want to state to this Committee that I, for one, am most unhappy about present conditions in our State.”

Fleming was particularly upset at the unrelenting use of economic intimidation against black agitators and at the persistence of other forms of massive resistance in the South Carolina black belt. He reported that members of the Clarendon County Improvement Association (CCIA) could not get credit for farm supplies. The NAACP had provided loans so that farmers could purchase materials with cash, but the effects of Hurricane Gracie in the fall of 1959 “virtually wiped out the entire crop in the county, leaving many of the farmers . . . not only in debt for the money advanced in 1959 but unable to finance planting for 1960.” As if economic reprisals and natural disasters were not enough, a cross was burned in front of Fleming’s funeral home after his congressional testimony and many Clarendon County doctors refused to treat members of the CCIA. Fleming attempted to build a doctor’s office and a pharmacy for black patrons, but could not find an African American doctor willing to move into the facility while white suppliers refused to stock the pharmacy.

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18 Ibid.

The NAACP also reported continued economic intimidation in Jasper County. During the summer of 1960, the mortgage was called in for the property of Vanuel Mitchell. I. DeQuincey Newman, who was South Carolina’s NAACP Field Secretary, contended that local bankers were attempting to apply pressure to Mitchell because of his involvement in a voter registration drive in the early months of 1960. According to Newman, “Mr. Mitchell . . . was among the few NAACP Members who remained firm against the white Citizens Council onslaught during 1955-56-57.”

The state’s reluctance to desegregate voluntarily, the persistence of economic intimidation, and the continuation of terrorist threats frustrated, but did not halt civil rights activists. In August 1959 at least 15 black students in Clarendon County requested reassignment to the county’s all white schools. By September, African Americans had petitioned all three districts within the county and the number of student transfer requests had grown to nearly 80. Even though Clarendon County was specifically named in the Brown decision, Clarendon County Superintendent of Schools and local Citizens’ Council leader L.B. McCord promised that “There will be no Negroes in the [white] schools of Clarendon County when they open,” and all three of the county’s school boards turned down the requests. County officials argued that any request for pupil reassignment had to be made at least 40 days prior to the beginning of the new school year. State officials endorsed this position. Governor Hollings simply stated, “The situation in Clarendon County will come out all right,” and Gressette assured worried

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white South Carolinians that the county had acted within the laws of the state of South Carolina.\textsuperscript{21}

Revealingly, the mounting challenge to segregated education in Clarendon County did not generate a call for legislative action from the Gressette Committee. Gressette promised to keep a close eye on the situation, but did “not anticipate making any “additional recommendations” regarding segregation to the General Assembly. According to the powerful state senator, “The present laws on the subject appear to us to be adequate for the present.” In reality, Gressette and many other members of the General Assembly had quietly come to the conclusion that, in the very near future, some desegregation would have to occur in South Carolina. Of course, that had been inevitable for several years, and yet, state leaders had previously chosen to pretend otherwise and generally avoided any compliance with federal desegregation orders.\textsuperscript{22}

That is not to say that Gressette and other white leaders were committed to any true compliance during the early 1960s. Especially regarding school desegregation, white leaders had laid the groundwork for significant delays of meaningful desegregation. Throughout the 1950s, the General Assembly had enacted a series of complicated pupil placement laws and academic standards designed to prevent integration of the state’s schools. Before students could sue in federal courts for admission to a white’s only school they had to exhaust every bureaucratic avenue put in place by the state and local governments. Furthermore, cases were heard individually. Each student had to request

\textsuperscript{21} Southern School News (September 1959) 4, (October 1959) 13, (November 1959) 12.

transfer, prove that they were within the correct geographic area, and that they could meet certain academic standards before they could take the matter to a federal court. In South Carolina, state and local officials were adept at using these complex pupil placement laws to frustrate most attempts to desegregate the state’s schools.23

Although the intricate system of pupil placement rules and the reluctance of state officials to begin planning for desegregation created a daunting challenge for civil rights attorneys across the South, black activists in other states had successfully challenged nearly every aspect of *de jure* segregation between 1958 and 1963. Even in South Carolina, African Americans had successfully sued to desegregate public parks and won nearly every school desegregation case brought by the NAACP legal team. Though implementation of court orders had lagged in the Palmetto State, these legal challenges had eroded white confidence in massive resistance. During the 10 years after the *Brown* decision, it seemed to embattled South Carolina whites that, in every avenue of public life, black activists were fighting with growing success for an end to racial discrimination. By 1962, white apprehension in South Carolina was near its zenith. By the end of the year, every other southern state had experienced some desegregation in their educational systems and every indication was that South Carolina would have to follow suit during the course of the next year. Though the state had managed to evade court ordered desegregation thus far, legal experts recognized that other cases (such as

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those in Charlottesville, Norfolk, and Little Rock) had set legal precedents that would eventually apply to cases already pending in South Carolina.²⁴

As the lone hold-out, some of South Carolina’s state officers and candidates for election began to acknowledge publicly that local governments would face a difficult decision in the coming months. For instance, Representative Robert McNair argued that local governments were best equipped to deal with the segregation issue. Although McNair’s suggestion left the door open for some hardcore resistance, it also recognized that, in many areas, whites were simply unwilling to engage in the most militant kinds of resistance. Moreover, it was yet another example of the growing tactical schisms dividing the state’s white segregationists. James McBride Dabbs of the Southern Regional Council (SRC) noted that “The Deep South is cracking,” and predicted that in the near future, “the crack will open in South Carolina.”²⁵

In the late 1950s, African Americans had laid the groundwork for several challenges to de jure segregation in South Carolina’s schools and to racial separation in public places. By the beginning of the 1956-1957 school year, representatives of the Greenville County Chapter of the NAACP reiterated its desire for the local school board to respond to its 1955 desegregation petition. Donald James Sampson, an NAACP attorney, sent a letter to the chairman of the county school requesting that the county reply to the petition. “We are anxious to exhaust our internal remedies with the hope that formal litigation of this matter may not be necessary,” wrote Sampson. However, local

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civil rights leaders did promise to take legal action to desegregate county schools if the school board failed to “do something positive” in the near future.26

African Americans also began to flex their political muscle in Rock Hill. During the summer of 1956, Dr. Dewey M. Duckett, a prominent African American in the city, led a group of middle class blacks in calling for the Board of Trustees of Rock Hill District Three to comply with the Brown implementation order. The committee challenged the city “to facilitate the carrying out of the Supreme Courts (sic) decision on public schools, particularly the public schools of Rock Hill,” and asked that the city government not “enter into, encourage or endorse any sort of agreement expressed or implied to circumvent these laws of the United States.” Black leaders also initiated a boycott against Star Transit Company to protest segregated seating on city buses. The boycott eventually led to the company’s bankruptcy and became a startling reminder to white businessmen of black economic power.27

However, the most successful desegregation battle involved public spaces in Charleston. In November 1958, a group of African Americans led by local NAACP President J. Arthur Brown attempted to play golf at a segregated municipal course in Charleston. When John E. Adams, the facility’s manager, refused to allow the men to play, the local NAACP initiated plans to challenge the course’s Jim Crow policies. NAACP members John H. Cummings, John L. Chisolm, Robert Johnson, and Benjamin Wright filed a suit against the City of Charleston, the Charleston Municipal Golf Course.


Commission, and Adams. The suit alleged that segregation at the facility was unconstitutional and asked for an end to “racial segregation in public parks and recreational facilities in Charleston.” The plaintiffs also asked that the court issue a restraining order preventing the City of Charleston from enforcing the state’s Jim Crow laws at the municipal course.²⁸

After two years of judicial wrangling, Judge Ashton Williams ruled, grudgingly, in favor of the plaintiffs and declared that the course must be open to all patrons, regardless of race. The judge argued that recent court decisions left him no choice but to order the desegregation of the golf course. He did, however, express his hope that the United States Congress might “some day pass legislation forbidding the Supreme Court from rendering decisions” that were unconstitutional and contrary to judicial precedent. Williams also granted Charleston an eight month grace period before his ruling took effect. However, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the eight month delay and ordered the immediate desegregation of the course.²⁹

In response, the city attempted to privatize or close the facility, but was prevented from doing so by a clause in its original contract with the Edisto Real Estate Company. When the company had donated the land for the course, it stipulated that it must be used for a golf facility. The contract also required the city to return the property to its original owner should it cease to operate a golf course on the land: the property could not be used for any other purpose and the city could not sell it to another party. Charleston’s city government could have simply closed the property, but that would have resulted in a loss


of all profits generated by the popular facility. With no other viable choices the city finally relented on May 26, 1961 and allowed African American golfers to play on Charleston’s municipal course. The desegregation of the facility occurred without incident. According to the *News and Courier*, it was “the first time in history” that black and white golfers had played the municipal course together.30

The NAACP’s victory in desegregating Charleston municipal golf course gave J. Arthur Brown the confidence to resume his challenge of segregation in South Carolina’s state parks. Moreover, it was an important victory that blacks hoped would eventually undermine Jim Crow. According to historian Grace Hale, leisure and cultural spaces were the places where racial identities were formed and the psychological underpinning of segregation were acted out. Brown and other black leaders understood, at least on some level, this dynamic and continued to pressure state leaders to abandon segregation in South Carolina’s recreational facilities. In June of 1961, Brown and nearly 20 other African Americans attempted to enter Sesquicentennial State Park near Columbia. Park officials closed the facility while officers from SLED and the Richland County Sheriff’s Office blocked it off to all visitors. Once again, the NAACP initiated a suit against the South Carolina Forestry Commission with Brown, H.P. Sharper, and J. Herbert Nelson as plaintiffs.31

Two months later, Brown, Sharper, and Nelson attempted to enter Myrtle Beach State Park. Again, the men were denied access. And, once again, Brown and the


NAACP brought a challenge to segregation in state parks in South Carolina. The case
did not go to trial for nearly two years. When the case was finally heard in 1963, David
Robinson, who was the lead attorney for the Gressette Committee, argued that if Judge J.
Robert Martin desegregated the parks, the state could not safely operate them. According
to Robinson, removing the racial restrictions at state facilities would lead to racial unrest.
Martin, however, found the arguments made by NAACP attorneys Matthew J. Perry and
Lincoln C. Jenkins more compelling. In July 1963, he ordered that laws “which require
separate parks for the use of white citizens and Negro citizens are in violation of the
Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution.” Rather than comply with Martin’s order,
the State Forestry Commission closed all 26 of South Carolina’s state parks. The
decision was further evidence that, although weakened and increasingly eclipsed by
advocates of managed non-compliance, supporters of recalcitrant massive resistance still
had their moments in South Carolina.  

Although disappointed in the parks case, African Americans continued to pressure
whites to dismantle the state’s Jim Crow system. In addition to the petitions and new
legal challenges, African Americans instigated inspections of federal offices located in
South Carolina. For example, the United States Department of Agriculture responded to
race-based economic intimidation by launching an investigation of the Clarendon County
USDA office. In July 1960, the investigators issued a report which concluded that the
local office had illegally discriminated against black farmers. Two USDA employees
were suspended for two weeks for the offense. Although the punishment was hardly
severe, it was, according to Billie Fleming, “another great victory against those that

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32 The State (June 17, 1961) 1A, (March 15, 1963) 1A, (April 19, 1963) 1A, (July 11, 1963) 2E, 9A.
would deny us our God given rights as American citizens.” The President of the CCIA understood that the “wheels of the federal government sometimes turn slowly,” but he emphasized, “the important thing is that we did get affirmative action.” Even a limited victory for civil rights activists in Clarendon County was cause for celebration in the black community and an incentive for more action.33

Political pressure to desegregate also increased in the upstate region when African Americans challenged Jim Crow at the Greenville Municipal Airport waiting areas. Segregation at the airport had been an issue for a number of years. Richard B. Henry, who was serving in the United States Air Force, had challenged segregation at the facility in the federal courts in the late 1950s. His initial case was dismissed by Judge George Bell Timmerman but was appealed. As Henry’s lawsuit worked its way through the judicial process another high profile incident occurred at the local airport. In October 1959, former baseball player Jackie Robinson visited Greenville to give a speech to members of the NAACP. During his visit, Robinson was asked to vacate a whites-only waiting area at the airport. The African American baseball legend and his hosts in the local black community were equally outraged by the episode.34

On New Year’s Day 1960 between 250 and 300 African Americans marched around the airport to protest the Robinson incident and the continuation of segregation at the facility. The march, which was called the Emancipation Day Prayer Pilgrimage, was organized by the Greenville Ministerial Alliance and the Greenville chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE), an organization which later tested desegregation of

34 Southern School News (January 1960) 2.
interstate transportation facilities during the “freedom rides” of 1961. Participants wanted to make it clear to white officials that they were no longer content to quietly negotiate for better treatment from whites. “We will no longer make a pretense of being satisfied with the crumbs of citizenship while others enjoy the whole loaf only by the right of a white skinned birth,” proclaimed Reverend C.D. McCullough of Orangeburg.35

The legal and direct action protests in Charleston, Clarendon, and Greenville Counties, however, were merely precursors to a larger wave of black dissent in South Carolina. On February 1, 1960 four black students sat at a segregated lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina and refused to leave until they were served in the same manner as whites. Over the next two months, similar protests proliferated across the South. The first such incident in South Carolina occurred less than two weeks after the Greensboro episode when African American students attempted to desegregate a number of lunch counters in Rock Hill, a midsized town just south of Charlotte, North Carolina.36

On February 12, a group of black students from Friendship Junior College entered Woolworth’s, McCrory’s, and a pair of local drug stores in Rock Hill. The students sat down at the business’s whites only lunch counters and requested service. Employees at the two drug stores asked all of their customers to exit the stores and closed for the day.


Each of the variety stores initially closed only the lunch counters, but a series of bomb threats eventually forced them to close entirely for the day. The black student protest was nonviolent, but one of the protesters was knocked from his stool by an angry white teenager, a female student was kicked by a white man, and another was hit with an egg as he was exiting one of the stores.37

Several days later, C.A. Ivory, the President of the Rock Hill branch of the NAACP, and three students from Friendship Junior College attended a meeting with student leaders from across the South in Raleigh, North Carolina. At that meeting, Martin Luther King, Jr. called on the young activists to form a youth oriented wing of the SCLC. The students resisted King’s overtures (as well as overtures from CORE and the NAACP) and formed the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

Following the meeting in North Carolina, the leaders of the Rock Hill movement and the state NAACP called for a similar coordinating committee in Columbia. Although SNCC was less active in South Carolina than in other parts of the South, the Rock Hill protests and formation of the national organization provided a spark for similar sit-in demonstrations across the state.38


The new youthful and dynamic direct action campaign added to the worries of South Carolina’s white leadership. The head of SLED and the mayor of Rock Hill demanded that Friendship College President Reverend J.P. Diggs intervene and call for an end to sit-ins. Diggs, however, issued a statement proclaiming that, even though no one at the school had assisted in planning the demonstration, he was “not opposed to this movement.” Governor Hollings condemned the demonstrators for trying to “create violence and not to promote anyone’s rights.” Local whites were equally outraged, and shortly after the incidents, a group of over 120 local whites met with ACCSC Chairman Farley Smith at the Union Hall of the Celanese Corporation to discuss the organization of a local Citizens’ Council. At the meeting, which took place after an extended period of declining WCC influence, Smith encouraged the new chapter to refrain from physical retaliations against the protesters. He professed his belief that violent retaliation would do more harm than good and urged anxious whites to channel their anger through a local WCC chapter. By the end of February, the first York County Citizens’ Council had a membership of over 350. Though the local paper expressed some misgivings about the Councils, it credited Smith with “wetting the fuse of an emotional powder keg.”

Nonetheless, at a meeting a year later, whites seemed to have re-lit the fuse of racial hatred in Rock Hill. Morrison Shaw, the President of the Rock Hill Citizens’ Council urged businesses to fire any African American employee who had participated in civil rights protests. Shaw remembered that Smith had visited Rock Hill on “the day we had pistols on our hips and blood in our eyes, and I’m sometimes sorry that he came. I wonder if we couldn’t have straightened it out right then.” Although he believed that

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“These Negro organizations don’t care if you kill every Negro in Rock Hill, so long as they get their picture taken and publicity in the New York papers,” he did acknowledge that the WCC did not want “to give them that kind of publicity.”

The notion that violence was the certain reaction of working class whites to black agitation was accepted dogma in South Carolina. Many middle and upper class whites were still convinced that, if their anger was not properly directed, working class whites would respond to any challenge to the racial status quo with physical force. Membership in the Councils may have declined sharply after 1957, but the perception that ACCSC membership was a somewhat more respectable outlet for white frustrations than the KKK remained intact. Most upper and middle class whites had lost confidence in the effectiveness of WCC tactics, but they preferred that working class white segregationists operated within the Councils, where white professionals still had some influence.

Reverend M.A. Woodson, who was an executive member of the ACCSC, told a North Charleston audience that “If the Citizens’ Councils don’t resist, the Ku Klux Klan will.” He encouraged whites to re-energize the WCC in South Carolina so that segregationists could “work in the open in a dignified manner to resist judicial tyranny.”

Not withstanding the renewed appeals of the WCC faithful, however, general interest in adopting Council tactics and platforms continued to wane during the 1960s as other less overt modes of resistance grew in popularity. Within weeks of the Rock Hill protests some of South Carolina’s state legislators attempted to re-energize the hardcore faithful and introduced several new proposals to the state legislature. Despite these

40 “Sit-in Problem Solution is Proposed,” undated clipping from the Rivers Papers, SChS.

41 Southern School News (April 1959) 13.
efforts, their counterparts in the General Assembly refused to pass any emergency legislation to deal with the lunch counter issue. Rex L. Carter, the Speaker Pro Tempore of the South Carolina House of Representatives, sponsored a bill that required a $100 fine or 30 days imprisonment for anyone who refused a request from management to vacate a business or eating establishment. State Representatives Ryan C. Shealy and Albert J. Dooley of Lexington County called for a new law allowing restaurants and lunch counters to levy an arbitrary cover charge from individual patrons. Other proposals were aimed at intimidating businesses with the threat of closure and proprietors with public scorn if they allowed race-mixing. Representative John C. Hart of Union County even introduced a bill to withdraw South Carolina’s ratification of the fourteenth amendment. Although these new propositions were representative of the hardcore perspective and in line with Citizens’ Council proposals, it is noteworthy that they were all rejected. Hardcore segregationists were still a sizeable faction in South Carolina, but they no longer dominated the public debate or had the influence to determine legislative agendas regarding segregation.42

The failure of these proposals in the state assembly was evidence that most white South Carolinians wanted to keep the state out from under the national microscope on racial matters. Hollings and other white leaders understood, more clearly than their predecessors, that violent outbreaks and heated rhetoric would bring unwanted and unflattering attention to South Carolina. Especially for middle class whites, orderly mass arrests by trained law enforcement professionals were more desirable than unchecked white vigilantism. After student activists threatened a march on the state capitol,

Governor Hollings declared that protesters would be arrested if they went through with the planned protests. Tapping into the venerable rhetoric regarding “outside agitators,” the governor rejected the notion that the march was a grass roots campaign against South Carolina’s Jim Crow laws. Instead he claimed to have “definite proof that outside, selfish, antagonistic groups” were involved. The governor argued that “regardless of the purpose, groupings together, parades, pilgrimages, sitdowns, silent marches, or whatever they may be characterized, are explosive in nature.” He promised that the state would “not allow such explosive situations to develop in South Carolina.” According to Hollings, there was “no point to any further incidents or demonstrations other than to breach the peace and cause violence.” Revealingly, the governor warned both African Americans and whites that state officials would not tolerate a disruption of law and order in the state.43

White South Carolinians, however, also understood that mass arrests had not ended civil rights protests in other southern states. Even the state’s few white moderates were unsure of how best to respond to the growing number of direct action campaigns. At a meeting of South Carolina’s interracial branch of the Southern Regional Council, the South Carolina Conference on Human Relations (SCCHR), in March 1960, members were split along racial lines as to whether or not to endorse the sit-in protests. According to an SRC member from Atlanta, Paul Rilling, “the Negro group [was] extremely militant and insistent upon a strong statement of support.” In an effort not to draw unwanted

43 Southern School News (April 1960) 5.
attention to the racial divide within the organization, SCCHR members decided not to vote on the issue.\textsuperscript{44}

Moderate whites, many of whom still refused to push openly for even token desegregation, worried that this intensification of African American direct action campaigns represented an increase in black militancy. In spite of the efforts to convince the state’s SRC members to be more supportive of black aspirations by liberal SRC members like Rilling and Spearman, the SCCHR simply could not reach a consensus over how to respond to the quickening pace of black direct action protests. According to Rilling, “It would only be candid to state that the South Carolina Council as an interracial movement is definitely in jeopardy.” He warned the organization’s officers that African Americans were “no longer interested in participating in any interracial agency which is not clearly and openly in favor of the ends they seek,” and reported that “few token whites in South Carolina can be openly related to this kind of interracial group.”\textsuperscript{45}

Student protesters took little notice of Hollings’s warning to desist in their protests and did not share the concerns of moderate whites that they were asking for too much too soon. By Rilling’s own admission, it was “increasingly clear that the sit-down situation has been a tremendous shot in the arm for Negro morale, spirit and militancy like nothing since the Montgomery boycott.” Several days after the Rock Hill demonstration, a group of 40 black high school students protested segregated lunch counters in Charleston. The young activists marched down King Street, the city’s most important commercial corridor, and rallied for an end to segregation at a local variety store. Twenty four of the

\textsuperscript{44} Paul Rilling to Harold Fleming and Paul Anthony (March 10, 1960), Papers of the Southern Regional Council, Microfilm Edition, Reel 146.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
protestors were later found guilty of trespassing and of failing to obey a police officer. Each was ordered to pay a 50 dollar fine or spend 15 days in jail for every offense.46

By March, youth driven protests had erupted all over the state. According to *Southern School News*, the demonstrations ranged from two or three people to “crowds approaching 1,000 in number.” In the first month and a half after the Rock Hill sit in, African American high school and college students staged sit-ins at white lunch counters, marches in front of white businesses, and protested at whites-only libraries. By the end of March, state and local police had settled on a policy of arresting the demonstrators who refused to disperse, and, within a few weeks, had jailed nearly 200 African American students in separate protests in Florence, Rock Hill, Denmark, Sumter, and Greenville.47

In the largest protest, police used tear gas and fire hoses to disperse a crowd of over 1,000 protesters in Orangeburg before arresting 388 students for disorderly conduct. The arrested students, most of whom attended South Carolina State or Claflin College, were herded into a temporary holding facility outside of the county jail. They were not provided with dry clothes or protection from the elements. Numerous students were later treated for exposure and for other injuries sustained as a result of exposure to tear gas or for injuries from the high pressure fire hoses. One woman suffered a fractured knee, another had several of her teeth knocked out, and another suffered a serious eye injury after being hit by water from hoses. According to an NAACP memorandum, nearly 40


students required medical attention as a result of their treatment during and after the protests. It is important to note that all of these injuries happened despite the professed agenda of Hollings and his allies to avoid the kind of violence and disorder that might attract federal scrutiny.48

National NAACP officers authorized organization funds for the students’ bail and promised legal aid. Local NAACP members provided the students with food until their bail was paid by T.K. Bythewood, a mortician, G.W. Daniels, a retired farm extension agent, James Sulton, a service station owner, and Dr. Charles Thomas, a professor at South Carolina State – suggesting significant adult, middle-class support for the student protesters. Over 200 of the defendants were tried within the first month and a half of the protests. The jury consisted of five whites, and one “hand-picked” African American. Each defendant was found guilty and fined 50 dollars or 30 days in jail. In another illustration of white opposition to the protests, at the end of the semester over 20 student organizers from South Carolina State were informed that they could not return to the school for the fall semester.49

Reverend H.P. Sharper, a Florence minister who was an NAACP officer, was exasperated by the police reaction in Orangeburg. He declared:

Because of the strong-arm, fascist-like tactics of peace officers. . . we conclude that appeal to federal agencies is our last resort. Regretfully, these appeals will be made immediately, for responsible officials of our state and municipalities have shown


Incidents like the Orangeburg protests were an indication to even the most ardent white supremacists that neither legal challenges nor direct action campaigns were going to stop until the state initiated some effort to desegregate its public school system and its public spaces and accommodations. Between 1960 and 1963, South Carolina activists unleashed an unrelenting flurry of legal challenges and nonviolent civil protests that targeted the basic structure of Jim Crow. Nonetheless, some white segregationists were determined to fight until the very end to preserve the racial caste system. African American protesters became frequent targets of white anger, and, despite the best efforts of the Hollings administration to preserve public order, the state witnessed numerous outbreaks of violence in the final years of codified segregation. In February 1961, for example, two students from Friendship College were beaten by a mob of angry whites while protesting the segregated lunch counters at Tollison and Neal Drug store in downtown Rock Hill. According to an NAACP telegram, there were several police officers on the scene. The officers refused to intervene during the attack, but they did manage to arrest the wheelchair bound president of the Rock Hill NAACP, Reverend Cecil Ivory.51

Although at the national level the NAACP was still agonizing over the appropriateness of direct action demonstrations, local NAACP officials in South Carolina aided students in organizing additional protests. In late April, the NAACP Student

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50 Southern School News (April 1960) 4.

Leadership Conference held a meeting at the Penn Center in Frogmore, South Carolina. Students from North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida attended the meeting. Two weeks later the NAACP sponsored a meeting in Rock Hill to educate potential protesters on the “procedures for conducting Sit-ins.” The NAACP also organized a “State-Wide Youth Rally” at Claflin College in Orangeburg on May 14-15.  

The wave of arrests and the increasing involvement of more pro-active civil rights organizations, such as CORE and SNCC, in the protests intensified the level of anxiety in the state’s white communities. To whites, the direct action campaigns heralded a new era of black militancy. Local officials adopted various policies to curtail the demonstrations, but were often thwarted by the irresistible tide of black protests sweeping across the state. For example, the City of Charleston School Board adopted a policy which forbade students in the city’s schools from participating in demonstrations during school hours or on school property, but the new rule did little to discourage young black activists. Moreover, the arrest and intimidation of peaceful black protesters often rallied even skeptical black adults to support the cause. NAACP Field Secretary I. De Quincy Newman derided the Charleston school board and claimed that its members had carried “race relations to the slaughter pen.” The local NAACP called the ban “Hitleristic.” Under the direction of J. Arthur Brown, the Charleston chapter adopted a resolution calling for the school board to lift the ban. In the end, the board’s actions did little to dissuade students’ from Charleston’s black high schools from continuing to protest.

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segregation in the city. During April and May of 1960, high school students from Burke, Immaculate Conception, Cresham Megget, and Bonds-Wilson High Schools engaged in fourteen demonstrations against segregated lunch counters at Woolworth’s, W.T. Grant’s, and S.H. Kress.53

Across the state, young black protesters continued to pressure for rapid change. In March, a second protest in Rock Hill led to the arrest of 70 students from Friendship Junior College. After attaining bail, the students prayed in front of the Rock Hill City Hall and sang the national anthem. In Columbia, students from Allen University and Benedict College marched on the statehouse. While police were busy shepherding them away, a second group marched on the governor’s mansion singing “Give Me the Old NAACP Spirit” and “I Shall Not Be Moved.” Sit-in demonstrations also continued in Orangeburg, Darlington, Florence, Denmark, and Sumter.54

Student activity often prompted adult participation. In Darlington, for example, a group of local parents initiated a lawsuit calling for the county to fire Mayo High School Principal Bennie A. Gary after he had expelled three students for participating in a boycott against the school cafeteria’s milk supplier because it was listed on an NAACP boycott list. Dozens of students had poured their milk into the garbage rather than drink it. According to the plaintiff’s attorney, Elliot D. Turnage, the suit was an “outgrowth of a statewide decision on the part of Negro pupils not to drink this milk.” Although the


case, which was brought in state court, was quickly dismissed, it was evidence that adult African Americans were becoming supportive of student protests in the state.\textsuperscript{55}

This kind of white militancy brought the attention of national civil rights organizations to South Carolina and helped to energize the determined young activists who participated in the direct action campaigns. In February 1961, Charles Jones, Charles Sherrod, Diane Nash, and Ruby Doris Smith of SNCC came to Rock Hill to help organize demonstrations in South Carolina. The participation of these prominent SNCC members may have been a boost to black morale, but it did little to curb the white backlash. Soon after arriving the four SNCC workers were arrested. Nash and Smith were sentenced to 30 days in the York County Jail. Jones and Sherrod were sentenced to a month on a chain gang. Though no doubt discouraging for some local blacks, the militant white response to SNCC activities did little to slow the increasing pace of black agitation.\textsuperscript{56}

In 1961, African Americans set forth to test the Supreme Court’s 1960 ruling in \textit{Boynton v. Virginia} which outlawed segregation at interstate bus and railroad stations. Members of the CORE and SNCC organized a “Freedom Ride” from Washington, D.C. to New Orleans, Louisiana. The protest reached South Carolina on May 9, 1961. At a Greyhound Bus Station in Rock Hill, John Lewis, a founding member of SNCC, and Albert Bigelow, a white ex-Navy Captain, attempted to enter a whites-only waiting room where Lewis was approached by a group of young white men – one of whom directed him to use the “other side, nigger.” Lewis protested that, according to the Supreme

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Southern School News} (April 1960) 4, (May 1960) 3.

Court, he had a right to enter the segregated waiting area. The men responded with a vicious attack. Bigelow attempted to intervene, but he too was quickly thrown to the ground. Only after a white female freedom rider named Genevieve Hughes was knocked to the ground did police intercede. It seemed that, even in such a tense situation, local officials would not condone physical violence against a white woman.57

In the midst of the direct action campaigns, South Carolina whites were also confronted with a revitalized legal campaign from the NAACP. In April 1960, the parents of 42 children in Clarendon County District One filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the county had ignored the Supreme Court’s ruling in the original *Briggs* case. According to the lawsuit, racial segregation persisted in the district, even though it was one of the places specifically named in the *Brown* decision. Like the challenge to the pupil placement rules, the new case called for enforcement of the *Brown* ruling and the immediate desegregation of the county’s schools.58

The new Clarendon case even revived some support for closing the schools in the majority black county. Members of the Gressette Committee, however, worried that, if the schools in Clarendon County were closed, the situation would only get worse. In a private statement to the committee Wayne W. Freeman, the Gressette Committee’s secretary, accused the Summerton School Board (Clarendon District One) of placing “the rest of the state in jeopardy of court-ordered integration,” through its uncompromising resistance of any integration. According to Freeman, the best option available to South

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Carolina was to fight out each case and limit desegregation to a handful of students. If Summerton officials closed their schools, they risk a court order similar to the one issued in Charlottesville, Front Royal, and Norfolk.59

Freeman expressed his sympathy for the “determination of the people of Summerton either to keep their schools segregated, or to close them,” but he cautioned that “while Summerton can close its schools and still provide schooling for its relatively small number of White children, this is not true in my County or in other parts of the Piedmont section of our state.” Instead, Freeman, like most of the state’s elected officers, supported the plan of the Gressette Committee’s lead attorney, David W. Robinson, who believed that the state could limit desegregation if it made “every Negro child seeking admission to a White school apply individually and be judged on his own merits.” That way, only a “court order” would result in desegregation. At that point, and only at that point, should a local government exercise the option of school closure, he argued. Freeman also acknowledged, “Closing school is a form of surrender,” and pointed out that if African American petitioners were given class action status, the “class suit in Clarendon County will immediately open the way to integration of the schools in other parts of the state where the problem of operating private schools is impossible.”60

Since South Carolina law required each student to petition for transfer individually Robinson moved to eliminate every name on the Clarendon petition except for Bobby Brunson, whose name was the first listed. District Judge C.C. Wyche agreed with

59 “Statement of Wayne W. Freeman, Secretary, South Carolina Special School Committee,” (May 2, 1960), Workman Papers, MPC. Margaret Gladney, “I’ll Take My Stand: The Southern Segregation Academy Movement” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of New Mexico, 1974) 42-56.

60 Ibid.
Robinson’s interpretation of the law and refused to hear the case as a class action lawsuit. Therefore, *Brunson v. Clarendon School District #1* went forward as a desegregation case involving only one student until the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals reversed Wyche’s ruling in December of 1962 to allow desegregation cases to be brought as a class action. As of May 1963, the case was up for adjudication in the courts.61

By the time the Clarendon County Case made its way to the federal courts as a class action suit, other black activists had orchestrated several major challenges to segregated education in South Carolina. During the summer of 1960, a group of Charleston parents, led by the NAACP’s local President J. Arthur Brown, demanded that Charleston District 20 improve African American education in the city. Black schools were overcrowded and the per pupil expenditures for African American pupils was nearly 100 dollars less than the average spending on white students. White schools had a 19:1 student to teacher ratio while African American institutions had a ratio of 25:1. Even though black leaders in the city were determined to eradicate Jim Crow schools, they also recognized that demanding improvements in existing black schools would benefit African American students and increase the fiscal pressure on the city’s white segregationist leadership to accept token desegregation as a means of alleviating some of those pressures.62

White officials in Charleston were faced with a difficult task. The main reason for the disparity between black and white schools in the city was white flight. White residents had been relocating to the suburbs around Charleston for more than a decade,


62 Ibid., 227-229.
resulting in a black student population of approximately 70 percent in Charleston District 20. In that district, which encompassed the Charleston peninsula, many of the existing problems could have been solved through desegregation. Since city officials knew that the days of segregated education were numbered, they had little incentive to invest in new black schools.

Before 1962, the NAACP’s legal strategy faced one crucial obstacle. At that point the appeals court had not yet ruled in the Brunson case, therefore, African Americans could not bring a class action suit against the district and, until a transfer request was denied, they could not even sue for admission to a white school on an individual basis. During the summer of 1960, the parents of 15 black students petitioned for transfer to Charleston’s whites-only schools. The requests were denied, but black parents remained reluctant to involve their children in a public court battle. In May 1961, five African American parents, including Brown, again petitioned the Board of Trustees of Charleston District 20 to allow the transfer of 13 black children into the city’s all white schools. 63

Unwilling to remain idle while they navigated the difficult bureaucracy of student transfer procedures, Charleston civil rights advocates sought to engage in a form of civil rights activism that did not place their children at the forefront of the freedom struggle. In 1962, the Charleston NAACP launched a “selective buying” campaign. The organization targeted merchants that catered to black customers, but did not employ African American workers. The NAACP distributed over 30,000 circulars to raise public awareness about job discrimination in Charleston. Within six weeks, the boycott had a

dramatic effect on several businesses. Some merchants told NAACP officials that their profits were down by “at least 25 per cent.” Reverend Ben Glover, the Chairman of the Charleston NAACP, estimated that the boycott was 50 to 60 percent effective. Paul Rilling reported to the SRC that “there seems to be little doubt that the boycott is hurting the merchants. This was confirmed by second hand accounts from several white persons.” After less than two months of protests, Piggly Wiggly Supermarket, Moskin’s Credit Clothiers, Farmer’s Market, Kaybee, and South Carolina Gas and Electric Company all hired at least one African American employee. By the end of June, West End Dairy, the Goodyear Tire Company, Sears Roebuck, Ward’s Five and Ten Cent Store, Vane’s Appliances, The Shoe Box, Leon’s Men’s Wear, and Kay’s Drugs had also hired black workers.64

In truth, the campaign was only a limited success. All of the merchants who hired black employees were located north of Calhoun Street near predominately black neighborhoods and away from the tourist district at the end of upper King Street. The News and Courier refused to print articles about the protests and local merchants, such as Edward Kronsberg (a prominent member of Charleston’s Jewish community who owned Edward’s Department Store and was considered by Rilling to be a political moderate), attempted to limit publicity surrounding the boycott. Whites claimed that the protesters represented a small part of the black community and insisted that most of the city’s African Americans had essentially ignored the boycott. An SRC report on the situation

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revealed that black protestors had indeed failed to win support from even moderate whites:

There seems to be woefully few forces for support in the white community. The Chamber of Commerce will do nothing. The Ministerial Association likewise; the Ministerial Association is completely inactive on such matters, so are the United Church-women, the YWCA, etc. 65

The most difficult problem for the black protesters was that all of the merchants south of Calhoun Street simply ignored the campaign. African Americans, essentially, gained some concessions within their own neighborhoods, but were unable to exert sufficient pressure on the “white” areas on upper King Street. Rilling reported that “none of the big establishments have . . . cooperated and there is certainly some doubt as to whether the boycott can be maintained until effective results are achieved.” To make matters worse, the NAACP desegregation petition was ignored by city leaders. 66

Regardless of its limited success, black leaders such as Brown and Glover portrayed the selective buying campaign as a much needed victory for African Americans in Charleston. Moreover, Glover and Brown hoped to use the momentum of the boycott to fuel support for their school desegregation efforts. When moderate whites failed to join the campaign or to embrace token school desegregation African Americans were left with no recourse but to bring a suit demanding the immediate desegregation of Charleston District 20 in accordance with the Brown verdict. The new lawsuit, which was brought by Brown on behalf of his daughter, stirred significant interest but little public reaction from local whites. An SRC report indicated that there was “no indications that the community is making any efforts to consider its future action.”

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.
Rilling concluded that “there is a general expectation among whites and Negroes that I met that the school crisis will not culminate in school closing or major disorders.”\(^{67}\)

While these various school desegregation suits worked their way on to federal court dockets, the NAACP’s legal team chose to focus its efforts on the desegregation of Clemson College and the University of South Carolina. It was easier to get cases involving desegregation in higher education heard by a federal court, since a student need only apply for admission and be rejected on the basis of race for a case to be brought. Unlike public schools, attendance was not limited by geography. Anyone could apply to a state college, even if they lived in another district, county, or state.\(^{68}\)

In January 1962, an African American student named Harvey Gantt applied for admission to Clemson. Gantt was the ideal candidate to break the race barrier in South Carolina’s system of higher education. He had been a student at Burke High School in Charleston where he was active in the youth chapter of the NAACP and he had previously attempted to enter Clemson in the late 1950s. After the school denied his admission on the basis of race, the state had paid for him to enroll in Iowa State University. Sensing the time was right for desegregation in South Carolina, Gantt sought a transfer to the upstate college for the 1962-63 school year. At first, Clemson officials again refused to act on Gantt’s request. During the summer of 1962, Gantt and the NAACP sued the school and demanded that it end its commitment to segregated education in accordance with multiple federal court rulings.\(^{69}\)

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\(^{68}\) Ibid.

The Gantt case and the numerous desegregation petitions and lawsuits challenging South Carolina’s racial apartheid threatened to alter the state’s racial hierarchy on a permanent basis. White leaders realized this and softened their public stance regarding token desegregation by the end of 1962. In his farewell address to the South Carolina General Assembly in early 1962, Governor Hollings proclaimed the Brown decision was “the law of the land,” and that the state’s efforts to avoid compliance had failed. The governor declared that “If and when every legal remedy had been exhausted, this General Assembly must make clear South Carolina’s choice, a government of laws rather than a government of men.” He called on his fellow lawmakers to “realize the lessons of a hundred years ago, and move on for the good of South Carolina.” In doing so, Hollings vocalized the opinion that had quietly become the new orthodoxy among South Carolina’s white political leadership.70

More than anything else, Hollings’s decision to back away from the harsh rhetoric of diehard resistance was motivated by events outside of South Carolina. Hollings knew that the national judiciary would eventually rule against South Carolina. Just a few months earlier, federal marshals had forced the desegregation of the University of Mississippi in Oxford. After the court-ordered admission of James Meredith to “Ole Miss,” whites rioted. By the time President Kennedy nationalized the Mississippi National Guard and ordered more than 23,000 troops into Oxford to restore order, 160 federal marshals had been injured, two people were dead, and 28 had suffered gunshot

70 Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina (1963) 44-45.
wounds. Hollings, apparently, learned a lesson from Mississippi that other southern governors, such as Ross Barnett and George Wallace, did not.71

During the Ole Miss crisis, Mississippi Governor Barnett had called Hollings to elicit the South Carolina governor’s support. He encouraged Hollings to lead a motorcade from Columbia to Oxford as a sign of southern determination to prevent forced desegregation. The South Carolina governor refused. He later determined that only “kooks,” “rednecks,” or “Ku Klux Klaners” would be interested in such a protest. The end result, according to Hollings, would be a dangerous confrontation that “could get a lot of people killed.”72

Hollings did, however, send J.P. Strom, who was the head of SLED to Oxford. Strom’s mission was not to support Barnett or to encourage white officials in Mississippi to continue resisting court ordered desegregation. Instead, Hollings had charged the state’s chief police officer with devising a strategy to ensure the safe and orderly desegregation of Clemson. The governor wanted a plan in place that would limit public disturbance without the presence of federal officers. He commanded Strom to witness the events and report on any mistakes that were made in Mississippi, so that South Carolina could avoid potential difficulties. If South Carolina was forced to desegregate, Hollings was determined that it not do so under the direction of federal authorities.73


72 Transcript, Oral History interview of Ernest F. Hollings by Marcia Synnott (July 8, 1980), Modern Political Collections, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

Hollings, of course, had other reasons for insisting on public order. For more than a decade white South Carolinians had worried that the hardcore approach would jeopardize federal investments in the state. In March 1962 those fears reached again resurfaced when Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) Abraham Ribicoff declared that segregated education would indeed impact federal education funding. According to Ribicoff, any segregated school that was attended by children whose parents lived on a federal military base would lose all federal funding in February of 1963. The new rule, which was derided by Hollings and other South Carolina officials, would affect schools in nine South Carolina counties. It was especially troublesome for officials in the Charleston and Beaufort areas where there were many military bases.74

By 1964, the desegregated Charleston Navy Yard had a total payroll of over $155 million and accounted for nearly six percent of the state’s total income. Moreover, Charleston’s commercial ports, which had been upgraded and improved with federal funds and depended on federal dredging operations, accounted for another six percent of the net state product. One economist went so far as to call the region’s economy one dimensional and noted that it depended almost entirely on military spending. He explained that the Charleston Navy Base’s impact on the local and state economy represented over $600 million in investment. Local officials did not want racial discord to impact federal decisions concerning base closures or funding levels at low country military installations.75

74 Southern School News (April 1962) 3.

Defense dollars were especially important to the state, but a lengthy and violent battle over desegregation could have also cause irreparable damage to other areas of the South Carolina economy. For example, if business leaders perceived a “racial problem” in Charleston, they may have chosen to import goods to another port without such difficulties. Civic leaders in Little Rock, Arkansas had cautioned their fellow southerners not to underestimate the impact of bad publicity on economic development, and chamber of commerce types all over the region were worried that investors might shy away from states with conspicuous “racial problems.” Between 1950 and 1957, over 40 new factories had relocated to Little Rock. After the local school board ordered the schools closed rather than desegregated none were opened. *Southern School News* reported that one in five “professional persons wanted to or was planning to leave the city.”

Throughout the South, business leaders and local chambers of commerce usually concluded that the defense of segregation was not worth sacrificing public order and with it economic stability. In the months after the zenith of the Birmingham, Alabama protests of 1963 it seemed especially apparent to many whites that ending black protests through compromise, even if it meant sacrificing some segregation, was the only means for calming southern race relations. In South Carolina, local politicians, such as Columbia Mayor Lester Bates, organized secret meetings with business leaders and civil rights advocates. In July 1963, he informed many of the city’s business elites that, if they failed

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to yield to at least some of the demands of civil rights activists, Columbia’s economic prosperity was in jeopardy. 77

To some extent, amongst the state’s business elites race relations had been in the process of a slow, uneven thaw for some time. Between 1958 and 1962, industrial construction in South Carolina surpassed $850 million and created nearly 60,000 new jobs and the New York Times had acknowledged that South Carolina did “not want to create an atmosphere of rebellion that would discourage the economic development of the state.” At the Hampton Watermelon Festival in 1961, industrialist Charles E. Daniel gave voice to those concerns when he encouraged South Carolinians to deal with the segregation issue before a solution was forced upon them by federal authorities. He argued that the state’s economic success was dependent on its African American workforce and insisted that it was in the state’s best interest to improve black education. He reminded the audience that South Carolina ranked near the bottom in per capita income, education, and standard of living. 78

In this era of intense apprehension about precisely how to resist, or at least manage the rising threats to white supremacy in South Carolina, the Federal Appeals court finally ordered Clemson to accept Gantt in January of 1963. By that time it was apparent to most South Carolina whites that the state had much to lose and nothing to gain by resisting the order. As the last state to desegregate, South Carolina would be under a national microscope. Fighting the order would have brought unwelcome attention from

77 Lofton, “Calm and Exemplary,” 70-81.

national civil rights leaders, unwanted federal intervention, and acute economic setbacks to the Palmetto State.

Some of the state’s most intractable hardcore segregationists, such as state Representatives John D. Long and Red Bethea, championed efforts to encourage white protests at Clemson or to close the school altogether, but the majority of the General Assembly advocated the maintenance of law and order during the difficult admissions process. Leading politicians, such as state Senator Edgar Brown, and prominent businessmen, such as Daniel, made public statements supporting a peaceful desegregation at Clemson. The college’s president, Robert Edwards, met with student leaders and publicly encouraged the student body to place personal safety and responsibility above racial discord. Even L. Marion Gressette, who had presided over the most successful attempt to preserve school segregation in the South, conceded that the state had “lost this battle.” In the end newly elected Governor Russell had secured the support from all but the most unswerving massive resisters and felt comfortable in refusing federal assistance to secure the troubled campus. Russell and other state leaders assured United States Attorney General Robert Kennedy that the desegregation of Clemson would not result in riots like the ones that had engulfed Oxford, Mississippi a few months earlier.79

By the time Gantt arrived on campus on January 28, 1963, 150 law enforcement officers were on duty in Clemson, students and staff had been issued new identification cards, and the state police had established checkpoints around the campus. Only authorized personnel were allowed on school property. The absence of outsiders meant that if trouble occurred, it would come from the student body and not from local whites.

The students, largely due to the year of preparation and fear of expulsion, remained calm. Within 15 minutes after arriving at the school, Harvey Gantt became the first African American student to ever enroll at Clemson.80

Governor Russell, President Edwards, and numerous other state officials received widespread praise for avoiding the kind of bloodshed and chaos that had characterized desegregation in other Deep South states and civil rights activists were encouraged by the clear victory in the Gantt case. Nevertheless, Gantt remained the only African American attending a previously segregated school in the entire state during the spring of 1963. Opposition to his admission was only overcome by a concerted effort to prove to South Carolina whites that absolute segregation and the preservation of public order were no longer compatible. At no point during the desegregation of Clemson did the state’s white population, and certainly not its political leadership, reject white supremacy. White opposition to desegregation, which only a few years earlier had been dominated by the doctrine of uncompromising massive resistance, had morphed into a new political coalition that placed the protection of the maximum feasible amount of white privilege above its commitment to complete segregation in all cases. Though some true believers persisted in calling for militant white resistance to every specter of integration, most of the state’s white population seemed willing to sacrifice some segregation for civic harmony and economic opportunity, providing the essential patterns of white privilege remained intact.

Across the state, white leaders began the process of implementing token desegregation. Limited black attendance, it seemed, was preferable to intrusive federal

80 Ibid.
intervention. The relatively peaceful manner in which the state managed the desegregation of Clemson encouraged other colleges to follow the lead of the upstate university. In June 1963 the SCMC authorized school administrators at its three South Carolina colleges; Wofford, Columbia, and Spartanburg Junior Colleges; to desegregate at their own discretion and, that fall, Judge Robert Martin ordered the University of South Carolina to accept Henri Montieth, the niece of prominent civil rights activist Modjeska Simkins.81

Desegregating South Carolina’s flagship university was far more difficult than desegregating Clemson. Unlike the upstate school, USC was located in the heart of downtown Columbia. Therefore, the state would have a difficult time keeping troublemakers from entering the campus grounds. Administrators were particularly nervous after a homemade bomb left a five foot wide crater in the front yard of Montieth’s uncle. However, when Montieth entered the campus for the fall semester of 1963, the desegregation occurred largely without incident.82

South Carolina’s other colleges gradually followed suit. Furman University became the first private college to end its practice of segregation in the fall of 1964. Though some South Carolina Baptists were appalled that the church-affiliated school voluntarily ended its single race policy, it too desegregated without violent protests. The next year Lander College, a Lutheran affiliated school, and Winthrop, a state college for women, voluntarily desegregated. Even the College of Charleston, which was the only college in the state to privatize to avoid desegregating, finally relented on June 12, 1966.

when its Board of Trustees announced that, due to the near bankruptcy of the school, it had no choice but to desegregate and, therefore, become eligible for public funds. It seemed to most white observers that the token desegregation of the state’s higher education system was, indeed, “dignified.” To there black counterparts, however, the limited desegregation was little more than a small victory in a larger battle for equality.83

In the 1960s, most white South Carolinians conceded defeat in their quest to defend \textit{de jure} segregation, but they were determined to negotiate favorable terms of surrender. In the previous decade intractable hardcore resisters had hoped to maintain white solidarity on racial issues by creating the perception that the state had limited options. Uncompromising segregationists such as the grassroots white supremacists of the Citizens’ Councils had attempted to control the debate over compliance by preaching that, if white South Carolinians capitulated in the fight to maintain a rigid system of Jim Crow or failed to resist every attempt to weaken racial segregation, they would have no other option but to surrender to black demands and federal pressure for full compliance. Essentially, hardcore whites argued that the only options were uncompromising resistance or immediate and full integration. As the state entered the 1960s, however, a growing number of whites sought an alternative to the more militant forms of white supremacy championed by rural conservatives like Governor George Bell Timmerman during the 1950s.

As discussed in the previous two chapters, tensions between militant white supremacists and their more moderate neighbors had been present in South Carolina’s white communities for some time. The state’s uneasy alliance of white segregationists was always more conflicted than its leaders admitted, but it was not until mainstream whites concluded that hardcore massive resistance was no longer compatible with the
preservation of public order that widespread support for uncompromising resistance began to wane in South Carolina. Although the state’s decision to accommodate federal desegregation orders at the University of South Carolina and Clemson elicited a harsh response from hardcore segregationists such as state Representative John D. Long, many urban and suburban whites realized that the state could not risk the economic turmoil of a prolonged battle with federal regulators and supported a peaceful, albeit limited, desegregation of the state’s education system. Upper and middle class whites generally understood that this kind of minimal compliance would allow state leaders to manage racial change with less federal interference and limit the erosion of white privilege within a technically desegregated system. However, whites also recognized that minimal desegregation would only work as a resistance tactic if federal authorities were satisfied that tokenism qualified as compliance with the Brown verdict and subsequent legislation.

Therefore, some white conservatives began to search for a pragmatic political alternative that would alleviate federal pressure and placate non-southern whites. The consolidation and consequences of this trend is the primary focus of this chapter, which deals with the political implications of these events and the manner in which whites confronted the process of desegregation in South Carolina.¹

¹ Beyond divisions among South Carolina’s segregationist whites, the complexity of the white population was also demonstrated by South Carolina’s small but vocal community of white liberals that became more outspoken in the early 1960s. For the best example of this, see: Marcia Synnott, “Crusaders and Clubwomen: Alice Norwood Spearman Wright and her Women’s Network,” in ed. Gail S. Murray, Throwing off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women Activists in the Civil Rights Era (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004) 49-76. According to historian Joseph Crespino, whites in Mississippi came to a similar conclusion by the late 1960s and adopted a policy of “strategic accommodation” that was intended to maintain as much white privilege as possible within a technically desegregated system, see: Joseph Crespino, “Strategic Accommodation: Civil Rights Opponents in Mississippi and Their Impact on American Racial Politics, 1953-1972” (Ph.D. Dissertation: Stanford University, 2003).
Since it was clear to most whites that Dixiecrat-like regional protest candidates alienated non-southerners and attracted unwanted attention from national civil rights groups, many whites began to look toward the conservative wing of the Republican Party in hopes that it would provide a political solution that would allow for the maximum amount of segregation within a system that had technically complied with the *Brown* decision. An alliance with “New Right” conservatives seemed like a potentially potent political union. Unlike southern third-party movements, New Right conservatives tended to downplay overt racism in favor of calls for limiting federal influence and rolling back New Deal social programs. Moreover, this group, which was generally a combination of white social and economic conservatives, echoed southern white fears about the “moral decline” of the United States and, especially in the West and Mid-West, conservative Republicans campaigned using staunch anti-communist rhetoric and racialized attacks on social welfare spending that carried a number of rhetorical similarities to southern critiques of the civil rights movement.2

One of the earliest proponents of this new political alliance in South Carolina was Republican organizer Greg Shorey who declared in the late 1950s that the state’s Republican Party organization should take advantage of voter angst over racial issues and abandon any notion that it was a biracial opposition party. Shorey predicted that internal

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changes within both national parties would lead a majority of white South Carolinians into the GOP. To help facilitate this change, he skillfully combined the conservative critique of the welfare state with white anxiety over the pace and scope of racial change to offer white voters a political alternative. The Democrats, he claimed, were the party of “socialist-labor,” and the Republicans were the party of “free enterprise.” Over the next several years, Shorey introduced his fellow South Carolinians to the conservative wing of the national Republican Party with extraordinary success.3

South Carolina already had a number of prominent political and economic leaders who tended to side with conservative Republicans on some national issues. For example, during his tenure as governor, James F. Byrnes had supported the strongest “right to work” laws in the nation. Both Senator Strom Thurmond and Congressman L. Mendel Rivers had championed staunch anticommunism and worked with Republicans in congress to ensure massive increases in the national defense budget. Newspapermen Thomas R. Waring of the Charleston News and Courier and William D. Workman of The State in Columbia frequently wrote editorials favoring a reduction in social welfare spending. Construction magnate Charles Daniel had promoted a lower corporate tax rate and anti-union legislation. Each of these issues was a significant component of the

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emerging conservative agenda that dominated discussions within the John Birch Society and on the pages of William F. Buckley, Jr.’s *National Review.*

Such a convergence of interests notwithstanding, during the late 1950s Republicans still had a long way to go in South Carolina before they would be competitive in elections. Allying with the GOP was a very different thing from joining it. There was virtually no statewide Republican organization in South Carolina until the mid to late 1960s. Furthermore, Eisenhower’s use of force in Arkansas, Democratic support for farm subsidies, and traditional allegiances to the Democratic Party made it difficult to form a potent GOP at the precinct level in South Carolina. However, the issue of race was a powerful catalyst for the growth of the Republican Party in the Palmetto State. Eisenhower may have demonstrated that Republicans would not allow the South to defy *Brown,* but in the early 1960s the party’s conservative wing, best represented by Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, gave many southerners hope that a coalition of conservatives could negotiate for less stringent rules of compliance to federal judicial orders. For whites who recognized the impracticalities of diehard massive resistance, minimal desegregation was an attractive alternative to true integration and they surmised that a Republican Administration might be more conducive to their agenda.

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The first visible signs of an electoral shift occurred during the presidential election of 1960. Despite Texan Lyndon B. Johnson’s appearance on the ticket as the party’s nominee for the vice-presidency, white segregationists had largely given up any hope that the national Democratic Party would soften its stance on race. They also had no faith in the Republican Party to defend any vestige of racial segregation, but given the growing sense that national Republicans were more amenable to token desegregation there was hope for the creation of a potent conservative political alliance. Nationally, the Republican Party was more homogenous than the Democratic Party. Therefore, GOP candidates outside the South faced less pressure from African Americans and New Deal liberals to push for immediate and far reaching integration. By 1960, Republican strategists began to recognize that they could pursue the votes of southern whites without jeopardizing important voting blocs within their own party. Richard M. Nixon, the Republican candidate for president in 1960, proclaimed that “It’s time for the Democratic candidates to quit taking the South for granted and it’s time for the Republican Party to quit conceding the South to the Democrats.” Although Nixon was a member of the NAACP and had courted black voters for Eisenhower during the 1956 presidential campaign, he presented himself as a more racially conservative candidate than his opponent, John F. Kennedy.5

Nixon and his campaign staff knew that Kennedy was vulnerable in the South. The Democratic Party Platform called for “an affirmative new atmosphere in which to deal with the racial divisions and inequities which threaten both the integrity of our

democratic faith and the proposition on which our nation was founded – that all men are created equal.” Furthermore, the platform declared, “The time has come to assure equal access for all Americans to all areas of community life including voting booths, schoolrooms, jobs, housing, and public facilities.” In the months leading up to the Democratic National Convention, Kennedy and his future running mate, Lyndon Johnson, campaigned for an active federal role in desegregating the nation’s schools and for ending racial discrimination in federal housing programs. Though Kennedy downplayed that role in the general election, his nominal interest in civil rights was disturbing to southern whites who were especially uneasy after the Democratic candidate telephoned Martin Luther King, Jr.’s wife Coretta on the eve of the election after a number of black activists, including Reverend King, were jailed in Georgia during a civil rights protest. In the mind of both whites and blacks the call associated Kennedy with King’s agenda despite the fact that Kennedy’s support for civil rights was tentative and circumscribed during the 1960 campaign and for several years in office.6

Kennedy enjoyed a reputation as a political moderate throughout much of the nation, but southern whites tended to view the northern Democrat with skepticism. To conservative critics, Kennedy’s phone call to Coretta Scott King was evidence that he was not the moderate candidate that he claimed to be. South Carolina’s delegates to the national convention reacted to those concerns and protested the civil rights plank. Although those protests were futile, conservative South Carolina Democrats were once again able to convince the state party to adopt a resolution allowing party members to

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vote for the presidential electors of their choice without jeopardizing their standing within the Democratic Party of South Carolina. That, however, was not enough to convince many hardcore segregationists to remain loyal to the state party. In the weeks following the national convention, several leaders from the 1956 independent elector movement, such as former Association of Citizens’ Councils of South Carolina (ACCSC) Chairman Micah Jenkins, announced their defection to the Republican Party. In the metropolitan areas around Columbia and Charleston, the GOP seemed to win scores of converts almost overnight. One study of these “new Republicans,” found that most of them had followed a similar path to GOP membership. Either they were political novices in their twenties or early thirties, or they were former Democrats who felt alienated by the party’s new “liberal” image. According to political scientist Gregory Sampson:

They had supported Thurmond in 1948 as the “official” Democratic Party nominee. In 1952, they had been prepared to forsake the Democratic label entirely to back Eisenhower as an “Independent.” In 1956, they had voted against the policies of the national Democratic Party by supporting Eisenhower or the “Independent” slate of electors.7

Given the Democratic Party’s strong state organization and lingering distrust of the Republican Party among working class whites, some political hopefuls chose to endorse national Republicans without formally leaving the party of their grandfathers. For the fourth consecutive presidential election, dissident Democrats formed an “independent” organization that endorsed a candidate other than the party’s nominee for the presidency. Under the direction of Albert Watson, a Columbia attorney, “South Carolinians for Nixon and Lodge” campaigned for the Republican candidates in South Carolina. In a portent of

things to come, the new organization focused almost exclusively on the issue of civil rights to woo white voters in the Palmetto State.8

In the national campaign, the ideological differences between Nixon and Kennedy were hardly perceivable. Each candidate argued in favor of civil rights, but downplayed the issue during the campaign; they both were staunch anticommunists; and they both called for increases in the defense budget. On the state level, however, Republican Party officials and dissident Democrats drew a stark contrast between the two candidates. Watson’s organization was especially adept at portraying Nixon as the only true “conservative” in the race. He claimed that communists were hopeful of a Kennedy victory, and arranged for ex-Dixiecrat and former governor of Texas Allan Shivers to campaign for Nixon in South Carolina.9

ACCSC Executive Director Farley Smith refused to endorse any candidate, but declared that the Republican civil rights plan was less offensive than the Democratic one. Likewise, Senator Thurmond called on voters simply to vote their conscience. Although he retained his Democratic Party affiliation, Thurmond did not campaign for, or endorse, Kennedy. Former Governor Byrnes, who had endorsed Eisenhower in 1952, publicly declared his support for Nixon. Other former Dixiecrats, such as Rivers, preached party loyalty, but took little or no part in the campaign. The end result, according to Sampson was that “opponents of black civil rights” implied that, if Kennedy were elected, the new president would “inflict the most damage on southern racial convictions.”10

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8 Ibid., 317-319.


Conversely, Senator Johnston, Edgar Brown, and other Democratic stalwarts reminded voters of Nixon’s membership in the NAACP, his courtship of black voters in 1956, and his support of civil rights legislation. However, their efforts did not persuade many white segregationists that Nixon and the Republicans would be more aggressive on civil rights than a Democratic Kennedy White House. A typical Nixon voter was either a middle or upper class white professional living in or around one of South Carolina’s major cities or a less educated white living in a county with a significant black population. Population growth, economic changes, and national political realignments all contributed to this change, but racial politics united poor black belt whites and urban educated whites under the Republican banner as both factions seemed convinced that rapid desegregation would lead to widespread social unrest, economic instability, and a palpable loss of white status and advantage.\[^{11}\]

Despite the stirrings of a significant Republican presence, Kennedy narrowly defeated Nixon with 51.2 percent of the popular vote in South Carolina. His victory was due to a combination of votes from white workers in the piedmont region, white farmers in the Pee Dee area who were suspicious of Republican efforts to restructure farm subsidies, and African American voters. However, the fact that Nixon did win the majority of the white vote was evidence of underlying changes in South Carolina’s political atmosphere. Nixon’s white majority was a combination of what political scientist Bruce Kalk called a coalition of “cosmopolitan whites” and “ultrasegregationists.” Furthermore, Nixon was able to preserve his reputation on the

national stage as a racial moderate while simultaneously giving the perception to South Carolina whites that he would be less apt to force rapid and sweeping racial change on the South. Though his “southern strategy” had not yet matured, Nixon’s campaign tactics did foreshadow his later political agenda.  

In South Carolina two distinct trends emerged from the Republican’s strong showing. First, the election was the first time that many white Democrats in South Carolina openly endorsed a Republican candidate on the Republican ticket. Second, it was the first election in which a large number of Democrats changed their official party affiliation on a permanent basis. Even Watson, who had been reluctant to switch parties, later announced that he would change his affiliation. The strong support for Nixon among “ultrasegregationists,” like Micah Jenkins, demonstrated a sharp contrast between South Carolina’s hardcore segregationists, and massive resisters in other Deep South States. In Alabama and Mississippi, for example, whites handed their votes to unpledged electors rather than endorse Nixon while white South Carolinians, it seems, had abandoned this kind of last-ditch political protest.  

Despite Nixon’s success with white voters in 1960, the nascent conservative coalition in South Carolina faced numerous obstacles. Rural southerners were not yet comfortable with the suburban “Sunbelt Republicanism” that was emerging in southern and western cities. For South Carolina Republicans the most difficult task became attracting white rural voters in state elections. South Carolina Democrats, such as Olin

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12 Ibid.

Johnston, Edgar Brown, and even Mendel Rivers had campaigned in rural counties by perenniially supporting popular farm subsidies, rural electrification, and other New Deal programs. As popular as the Goldwater wing of the party was with South Carolina’s rank and file Republicans, its opposition to programs like the Santee-Cooper hydroelectric plant was a significant impediment to building a dominant Republican Party in South Carolina. So long as rural whites believed that there was a significant difference between the Democratic Party of South Carolina and the Democratic National Convention, winning state and local elections was nearly impossible for the South Carolina GOP.

Nevertheless, there were some indications that the kinds of economic concerns that still animated urban working class whites and rural Democratic voters had begun to wane in South Carolina’s suburban areas. As the state moved further away from the poverty of the Great Depression many of South Carolina’s leading businessmen, such as Charles Daniel and textile executive John Cauthen, had stepped up their support for laws that were anti-union, anti-minimum wage, and pro-corporate tax cuts. More important, however, was their increasing tendency to call for an alternative to diehard massive resistance that took economic considerations into account. By 1961 it was clear that, as the influence of conservative Republican ideas gained strength among business elites, fiscal concerns would have a dramatic impact on the tenor of white resistance. Daniel and others continued to argue that the state had to solve its “race problem” or face the same kind of fiscal setbacks that plagued Mississippi and Arkansas during their massive resistance campaigns. Public disorder, he argued, would limit the state’s economic
potential. Likewise, Cauthen preached that “law and order” was absolutely necessary to ensure economic success.14

The kind of law and order conservatism preached by Daniel, Cauthen, and other business leaders was a sharp contrast to the working class campaigns directed by Olin Johnston, Edgar Brown and other South Carolina Democrats. It was also quite different from the conservative populism espoused by other southern leaders, such as George Wallace and Herman Talmadge, and less acerbic and demagogic than the rhetoric emanating from rural social conservatives like John D. Long. The appeal of law and order conservatism in South Carolina was undeniable. White resistance advocates recognized the emergence of law and order conservatism and tailored their efforts to appeal to business minded whites.15

For white segregationists, who still constituted the vast majority of South Carolina’s white population in 1960, the need for a new political option seemed to become even more urgent after Kennedy was elected. Soon after his inauguration, Kennedy named several African Americans to his cabinet. The new president’s nominees for Special Assistant to the President, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Associate White House Press Secretary, Special Assistant to the Secretary


of Labor, and Ambassador to Norway were all black. He also named Thurgood Marshall to the Second Court of Appeals. The combination of Kennedy’s support for African American appointees and the increase in black direct action campaigns – notably the student sit-ins and freedom rides – convinced many segregationists that the president was encouraging civil rights activism. By the time Kennedy federalized the Mississippi National Guard and ordered troops into Oxford Mississippi in the fall of 1962, southern whites had grown increasingly hostile to the Democratic president. The perception that South Carolina had no choice but to desegregate Clemson peacefully in 1963 was even further evidence to conservative whites that the federal government was acting beyond its constitutional authority.16

Republicans in South Carolina hoped to capitalize on this growing dissatisfaction and hostility and launched a concerted effort to win state and local elections with a monolithic campaign strategy. They simply reminded white voters that the Democratic Party was the “liberal” party of a president who they distrusted. The GOP’s first opportunity to score an electoral victory in a state election occurred in Richland County in 1961 during a special race to fill a vacant seat in the South Carolina House of Representatives. The Republican candidate was Columbia attorney named Charles E. Boineau, Jr. Like most of the state’s GOP members, Boineau had formally joined the party during the 1960 campaign, but actually had not supported the Democratic nominee in a presidential election since 1944.17


Boineau and his opponent Joe Berry held similar political views. Both men were avowed conservatives who believed in segregation. The biggest difference between them was their party affiliation. Even though the election was for a state office, Boineau was able to win by a landslide simply by campaigning against the national Democratic Party. He condemned the Kennedy Administration for “telling us whom we should hire” and attacked federal “control” of education. The combination of economic conservatism and white supremacy made Boineau an attractive candidate to both white professionals and die-hard segregationists. His more subtle criticisms of desegregation, economic conservatism, and carefully constructed defense of white rights spoke to his belief in white privilege without the kind of “ugliness” and impoliteness that was typical in racially based campaigns. His election-day victory in a solid Democratic state was evidence of the groundswell of popular support for an alternative political option in the South Carolina midlands.18

When GOP leaders examined the election results, they confirmed that the fastest road to victory in South Carolina was the combination of racial politics and economic conservatism. They were determined to build on their victory in Richland County by using Boineau’s strategy to win a statewide office in the 1962 mid-term election. In the senatorial election of 1962 South Carolina Republicans nominated newspaperman and outspoken conservative William D. Workman to challenge Olin Johnston. Workman was the only Republican whose name recognition could even compare with the popular

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upstate senator and his book *The Case for the South* was an indictment of federal intrusion into state and local matters and a defense of southern segregation.\(^\text{19}\)

The 1962 election was also notable in that it featured a strong Republican challenge in the Second Congressional District. The district, which included Columbia and several mostly rural counties surrounding it, was dominated by hardcore segregationists. Its Democratic representative, Albert Watson, was a well-known segregationist, but that did not stop ultra-segregationist Floyd Spence from challenging the maverick Democrat. Though there was a large African American community in Columbia and Richland County, it was dwarfed by the size of the white population. Furthermore, most of the African Americans in the surrounding rural counties were not registered voters. Thus, if Watson was to defeat Spence, he could not rely solely on high voter turnout from African Americans who tended to vote Democratic.\(^\text{20}\)

In a sense, both Workman’s and Spence’s strategy was the same as Thurmond’s had been in 1950 and Boineau’s in 1961. Both would remind voters that a vote for Johnston or Watson was an endorsement of the Democratic Party and, therefore, an implicit endorsement of the national party’s platform. Of course, Thurmond’s race based campaign against Johnston had been derailed by a combination of Democratic loyalists and African American voters. Nevertheless, GOP strategists, such as Shorey, felt that the state had changed enough during the 12 years since Johnston’s victory in the Democratic Primary to give Republican candidates a chance using the blueprint first utilized by

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Thurmond. Unlike in 1950, the threat of forced desegregation was immediate. Furthermore, the post-World War II economic boom had led to a dramatic increase in white collar workers in South Carolina. It was with this in mind that Republican strategist Drake Edens coordinated the party’s campaign strategy in 1962.\textsuperscript{21}

Throughout the campaign Workman and Spence limited their attacks to the “liberal” politics of the national Democratic Party and urged southern voters to find a new political home in the conservative wing of the GOP. Workman, for example, specifically assailed the unchecked growth of the federal bureaucracy and blamed the judiciary with undoing “good” race relations in the South. In essence, his campaign reiterated the criticisms of the national government that he had spelled out in \textit{The Case for the South}.\textsuperscript{22}

For many whites, the GOP strategy made for a compelling argument in the senatorial election. Olin Johnston had to rely on class politics and a strong African American turnout to defeat the GOP challenge. He labeled Workman the candidate of big business and declared that the Republican platform was at odds with the well being of working people. He also defended his support for popular New Deal programs, such as the minimum wage and Social Security. According to Johnston, Workman would be loyal to corporations and Republican fat cats. He also noted that his own record as an “independent” Democrat in the Senate were impeccable and demonstrated that he rarely voted along the “liberal” party line.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21} Merritt, “The Senatorial Election of 1962,” 281-301.

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Ibid}.
Workman was unable to overcome Johnston’s strong support from white textile workers and African Americans. Nevertheless, he captured over 44 percent of the popular votes, nearly the entire black belt, and the majority of the white vote. Moreover, the election was an important step in the GOP’s long term plan for South Carolina. Workman’s “polite” defense of racial segregation attracted both mainstream whites and hardcore segregationists. Moreover, Republican organizers, especially Eden, used Workman’s campaign to build a precinct level organization. The fact that Workman was able to galvanize support from hardcore segregationists and former Citizens’ Council members without resorting to the kind of “ugly” racism espoused by rural segregationists like John D. Long buoyed Republican hopes in South Carolina and laid the groundwork for the 1964 elections.24

Though it achieved similar results, Spence’s campaign was more difficult. Watson had been a frequent critic of the national Democratic Party and had broke ranks and supported Nixon’s campaign in 1960. Nevertheless, Spence’s relentless attacks on northern “liberals” won him 47.2 percent of the popular vote. Like Workman, however, he was unable to unseat his Democratic opponent, who ironically, most likely owed his narrow victory to the small number of black voters in Richland County. Despite this success, the small margin of victory worried the conservative Democrat. With the exceptions of Mendel Rivers and Strom Thurmond, no congressional representative from South Carolina had a more credible reputation than Watson for defending white privilege

24 Ibid.
and endorsing conservative candidates, and yet, Spence was still able to win over white conservatives – a core group in Watson’s political base.\textsuperscript{25}

Politics is important in understanding race relations in South Carolina. The strong showing by Workman and Spence in the election was a defining moment for the Democratic Party. It became clear to many state Democrats that without black ballots they risked losing future elections to conservative Republican candidates. As Democrats became more reliant on black voters, however, they also became, reluctantly, more open to negotiation with African American leaders. Though decisive change was still years away, Workman’s ability to take the white vote away from one of South Carolina’s most entrenched Democrats and Spence’s capability to challenge one of the state’s most uncompromising segregationists served as important lessons to later Democratic candidates. For example, in the election for the deceased Johnston’s senate seat in 1966, Fritz Hollings, who had been elected Governor in 1958 on a promise to preserve segregation, worked with black leaders to ensure a high African American turnout on election-day so as to offset the widespread defection of whites to the Republican Party. In other words, as more segregationist minded whites sought refuge in the conservative wing of the Republican Party, they also helped usher in a new, fragile, biracial Democratic Party in South Carolina.\textsuperscript{26}

\textsuperscript{25} Hathorn, “The Changing Politics of Race,” 228.

For more than a decade, South Carolina whites had rallied to calls for white solidarity. The desegregation of Clemson and the University of South Carolina tested that unity and exposed divisions within the white communities that had been obfuscated by the white defense of racial segregation. Though cracks in the façade of white unity had been apparent, and on occasions widened to a breaking point, throughout the post-World War II period, it was not until the federal courts began the lengthy process of desegregating South Carolina’s public schools that the various ideological factions within the state’s white communities began to coalesce into two separate political parties. Though protest votes in the presidential elections of 1948-1956 were indicative of white resentment of the national Democratic Party’s nascent interests in civil rights, it was after the South Carolina Republican Party stepped up its grassroots organization in the early 1960s that many black belt whites finally shifted away from diehard massive resistance and toward the GOP’s more nuanced racial conservatism. Even then, it was only after the GOP offered an alternative to both massive resistance and court ordered integration that it gained a lasting foothold in South Carolina politics.²⁷

The Republican preference of scaling back national pressure for immediate desegregation seemed especially important in August 1963 when Federal Judge J. Robert Martin ruled in *Brown v. School District 20 of Charleston County* that segregated primary and secondary schools in the city of Charleston had to accept 11 African American students and had to desegregate completely for the 1964-65 academic year. The case, which was filed by J. Arthur Brown on behalf of his daughter Millicent in May 1962,

²⁷ For a discussion of the importance of white political protests in South Carolina during the 1940s and 1950s, and their effect on state politics into the 1960s, see: Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
marked the first desegregation of a public school system in South Carolina since
Reconstruction. Furthermore, it provided a much needed legal precedent for all of South
Carolina’s unsettled school desegregation lawsuits. Though it was not the first
desegregation suit, it was the first successful example of court ordered desegregation of a
public school in South Carolina. To accommodate Judge Martin’s order, state and local
officials adopted the same plan that they had used at Clemson and the University of
South Carolina. SLED agents worked with the city police to insure public order, and
Charleston’s political establishment pleaded with Charlestonians not to do anything that
would draw the attention of federal law enforcement. With the exception of several
telephone bomb threats to the schools in District 20, the desegregation of Charleston’s
city schools was peaceful and orderly.28

That superficial calm may have concealed the deep resentment that most whites felt
toward forced desegregation, but it is noteworthy that South Carolina’s political and
economic elite were generally able to avoid the level of racial violence that erupted in
other Deep South states. In the months following the desegregation of Clemson and the
admission of African Americans to the University of South Carolina and Charleston
District 20, the nation was preoccupied with civil rights struggles in Mississippi and
Alabama. In June 1963, Medgar Evers, the NAACP field secretary for Mississippi, was
assassinated. In September, four young girls were murdered when a reputed Ku Klux
Klansman bombed the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. When

28 “Charleston County,” a report on Brown et al v. District 20 of Charleston County, Workman Papers,
The Year of Decision in South Carolina” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of South Carolina, 1996) 144-
258.
contrasted with this kind of well-publicized violence, South Carolina’s resistance to court
ordered desegregation did seem moderate. South Carolina had no counterpart to Sheriff
Eugene “Bull” Conner, who allowed police dogs to attack SCLC protesters and black
bystanders in Birmingham and ordered the use high pressure hoses against African
Americans. In 1963, SLED agents tried to minimize the use of force and demanded an
orderly non-violent response to peaceful protests in South Carolina. In doing so, South
Carolina was able avoid the kind of national scrutiny that descended on Mississippi and
Alabama. An article in the Saturday Evening Post declared the state had achieved
“integration with dignity” and United States Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and
other national leaders congratulated South Carolinians for avoiding the kind of
disruptions that plagued the desegregation of schools elsewhere.29

Still, some of the praise for South Carolina’s lack of civic disorder was warranted.
With a few notable exceptions, state elites were less dogmatic than many of their
southern contemporaries and SLED did seem up to task of preventing racial violence as
the state dismantled the Jim Crow system. Biracial committees had been organized in
most of South Carolina’s cities and white business leaders in Charleston, Columbia, and
Greenville had negotiated some desegregation of stores, agreed to extend courtesy titles
to African Americans, and, most notably in Columbia, began hiring African American
employees. Even Orangeburg, which was the site of some of the state’s most visible

29 George McMillan, “Integration with Dignity: The Inside Story of How South Carolina Kept the Peace,”
South Carolina,” in eds. Elizabeth Jacoway and David Colburn, Southern Businessmen and Desegregation
(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982) 70-81. For a discussion of the violence in
Alabama, see: Glenn Eskew, But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights
racial conflicts, witnessed an increase in interracial cooperation. Governors Hollings and Donald Russell had both conceded that South Carolina whites had lost their battle to maintain complete segregation in the public schools, and, after a decade of frustration, the SCCHR increased its membership and began to assert itself as a potent advocacy group for moderate whites.30

Nonetheless, it should be noted that this praise came at a time when less than 20 African American students attended desegregated public schools and colleges in South Carolina. Moreover, it would be an overstatement to suggest that white South Carolinians voluntarily acquiesced on the issue of desegregation. Any desegregation in the state came piecemeal, grudgingly and usually as a result of concerted black activism. It was obvious to even the most casual observer that Judge Martin’s ruling in Brown v. Charleston failed to spark rapid desegregation across the state. In spite of the order, most of the state’s rural school districts were determined to carry on the fight against desegregation as long as possible, state parks remained closed until 1966 to avoid desegregating them, and most of the state’s restaurants and hotels enforced a policy of strict segregation. Even in urban areas where state leaders considered race relations “good,” desegregation came only as a last resort. For example, in Greenville school officials agreed to a court ordered desegregation of county schools in the spring of 1964, but only after Judge Martin made it clear to them that he would use the Charleston precedent to rule against them. In Charleston, movie theaters, most restaurants, city parks, and hotels remained completely segregated. Only businesses that relied on a high

level of black trade had desegregated during the sporadic boycotts that enveloped the historic city in 1960-63.\textsuperscript{31}

By the summer of 1964 local school districts in Charleston, Clarendon, Sumter, Orangeburg, Darlington, Richland, and Greenville County were either under court ordered desegregation or facing a legal challenge to segregated education, and it was clear from events inside and outside of the state the number of desegregation cases was going to continue to increase. Nevertheless, most local districts refused to even begin negotiating the desegregation of their public schools. As the 1964-65 school year commenced only 16 of the state’s 108 school districts had undergone any desegregation. In Clarendon County and Orangeburg County, desegregation battles had raged for nearly a decade without even token desegregation. Both Brunson \textit{v. School District 1 of Clarendon County} and Adams \textit{v. School District 5 of Orangeburg County} were the result of desegregation petitions filed shortly after the \textit{Brown} implementation order, and both cases had been meandering through the court system for nearly all of the 1960s. Whites refused to concede defeat in either case until every legal option was exhausted.\textsuperscript{32}

This resistance continued despite the fact that whites knew that in every desegregation case the courts would eventually rule in favor of the plaintiffs. Still, whites took every opportunity to slow what should have been a flood of desegregation to a mere trickle. Even in the few cases where South Carolinians “voluntarily” desegregated, they did so under intense economic and legal pressure. With legal precedent on their side,


federal authorities in the executive branch understood that their most powerful tool was economic coercion and did not hesitate to use the promise of federal monies to encourage compliance whenever possible. For example, when the textile industry desegregated in 1961, it did so because the President’s Committee on Equal Employment reported that all future federal contracts would include a non-discrimination clause that prohibited a segregated workplace. Even then, it was not until the late 1960s that desegregation moved beyond the token phase and the mid-1970s before the percentage of black textile workers began to resemble the ratio of African Americans in the state’s overall population. 33

It was clear to South Carolina’s political and economic elites that, largely due to hundreds of local campaigns and increased pressure from nationally prominent civil rights activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., the federal government had become more committed to forcing desegregation during the Kennedy years. By 1963, the president and his brother, United States Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, had concluded that a more concerted effort was necessary and had authorized federal agencies to develop strategies to ensure compliance. As was the case with the desegregation of the textile trade, those strategies were most successful when they tied compliance to federal aid. For example, in February of 1963, the Assistant Secretary of the department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) asked Charleston County to desegregate any school attended by children of military personnel. Many of those schools had been built with the assistance of military impact funds and HEW officials argued that failure to comply with

federal policies regarding desegregation could result in the revocation of that funding. HEW demonstrated its commitment in the fall of 1963 when it opened desegregated schools at the Myrtle Beach Air Force Base and at Fort Jackson in Columbia using funds that could have gone to the local community. Confronted with examples of various regions losing federal income due to segregation in the early 1960s, Sumter District Two near Shaw Air Force Base offered to “rent” a school to the military for the education of children whose parents served at the base. Federal officials balked at the idea and pointed out that military impact funds had paid for the construction of Shaw Heights Elementary in 1953. HEW authorities noted that during the 1950s the federal government spent close to one million dollars on school construction near the base compared to a paltry 7,000 dollars contributed by Sumter County.34

It was under this kind of pressure from HEW that Charleston District Four (North Charleston) agreed to desegregate its schools in the fall of 1964 when it allowed the transfer of four African American students to schools previously designated “whites only.” Though the decision was lauded by civil rights activists, it was hardly voluntary. The district included or was located adjacent to the Charleston Navy Base, the Polaris Naval Weapons Station, the Naval Shipyard, the Charleston Air Force Base, the Navy Minecraft Base, and a host of other federal installations. All four of the African American students who were granted transfers were the children of military personnel.35


35 “Charleston County,” a report on Brown et al v. District 20 of Charleston County, Workman Papers, MPC.
Still, black activists and their allies had made undeniable, if circumscribed, progress in South Carolina. There was cause for hope, but there was also cause for trepidation. Without additional leverage, civil rights advocates understood that, for the foreseeable future, the extent of social and educational desegregation would remain limited. Advocates for black civil rights were given that leverage by the United States Congress in the summer of 1964. In the months after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, President Lyndon B. Johnson advocated strong civil rights legislation as a tribute to the fallen leader. Kennedy had originally proposed a civil rights bill. However, in part out of frustration with the continued southern intransigence and in response to the escalating violence surrounding the civil rights movement in many Deep South states, the new proposal was more far reaching than the one that Kennedy had supported.36

When President Johnson signed The Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law in July 1964 it was one of the most sweeping pieces of legislation to pass through congress since the

Great Depression. The new law strengthened the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and ordered the desegregation of public accommodations, facilities, and public school systems. The law also gave the office of the Attorney General of the United States sweeping authority to prosecute civil rights violations and to take legal action on behalf of complainants in civil rights cases.

Every notable elected official in South Carolina condemned the new legislation. Senator Strom Thurmond, for instance, denounced the law and the judicial activism that it encouraged. Thurmond argued that the civil rights law violated states’ rights, constitutional provisions regarding voting, and laws governing property rights. According to the senator, “The Declaration [of Independence] does not state that all men are equal. It explicitly points out that all men are created equal.” He insisted that voting was a “privilege” and not a “civil right.” Third Congressional District Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn called the law “An attempt by sinister forces to give the United States a guilt complex.” When the South Carolina Democratic Convention was held in Columbia in March of 1964, party members passed a resolution commending the state’s delegation to congress for opposing the “dastardly” civil rights bill.37

For black South Carolinians, however, the Civil Rights Act was a long overdue remedy to the slow pace of desegregation in the Palmetto State. When it was passed, less than 20 of the state’s 108 school districts operated under token desegregation, public accommodations were mostly segregated, and South Carolina’s system of state parks remained closed. These remnants of de jure segregation lingered despite multiple court

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orders, widespread popular protests, and threats of executive enforcement of judicial
decisions. On paper, the Civil Rights Act promised to undo what the Brown decision and
more than a decade of internal and external pressure could not and correct these
egregious violations of black civil rights.

However, like their elected leaders, white South Carolinians were generally
appalled by the new law and their outrage was conspicuously displayed during the
presidential election of 1964. Democrats were obviously worried that the party’s support
for the civil rights law would accelerate the exodus of white southerners to the
Republican Party and the growth of grassroots Republicanism during that election in
South Carolina was evidence that Democratic fears of losing white southern votes were
well founded. When the Republican National Convention nominated Barry Goldwater
for the presidency in July 1964, it was clear that a significant number of southern whites
would bolt the Democratic Party.

In 1960 Goldwater had published The Conscience of a Conservative. The book,
which condemned the unchecked growth of federal power and the dissolution of states’
rights, received favorable reviews in South Carolina. The senator’s call for a smaller,
less intrusive federal government was a popular message among the state’s
segregationists and its business leaders. At the Republican National Convention of 1960
a small group of South Carolina Republicans even attempted to encourage their fellow
Republicans to place Goldwater on the party’s presidential ticket.38

At first glance, Goldwater was an unlikely choice for South Carolina
segregationists. He was a member of the NAACP, he helped organize and lobbied for the

desegregation of the Arizona National Guard, and he argued that integration was a positive goal. The senator also voted for the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960. Nonetheless, he was a staunch advocate of states’ rights during the debates over civil rights legislation in 1964. According to Goldwater, decisions regarding desegregation, and the management of the process, should come at the state and local level. The federal government, he argued, did not have the constitutional authority to force desegregation on the South. The Arizona senator visited South Carolina in 1959 and gave the keynote address to the state Republican Convention in 1960 and 1962. As South Carolinians became more familiar with Goldwater’s particular brand of conservatism, they recognized an opportunity to relax some of the state’s rigid Jim Crow restrictions while also maintaining many of the aspects of traditional racial patterns in the South. 39

Despite Goldwater’s personal opposition to segregation, his presidential candidacy gained a large following in South Carolina. Many of his most staunch supporters were veterans of independent political movements and the White Citizens’ Councils. For example, Micah Jenkins, Farley Smith, and former Charleston Mayor Thomas Stoney all supported Goldwater on the Republican ticket. Likewise, Congressman Albert Watson, who was still a Democrat, endorsed Goldwater for president. However, Goldwater’s most notable support came from former Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond. In early fall, Senator Thurmond formally left the Democratic Party and declared himself a Republican.

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The switch sent shockwaves through southern political circles and helped legitimize Goldwater’s status as an acceptable choice to white southerners.40

Goldwater helped his cause among white South Carolinians with a vigorous campaign in the state. Like Goldwater, most white South Carolinians were staunch anticommunists and there was growing support for conservative economics in the state’s urban districts. However, race was the dominant issue for state Republicans in the election. At one campaign appearance in Greenville, Goldwater unknowingly appeared on stage with the grand dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and at a rally in Columbia on Halloween, he declared that the Civil Rights Act required southerners “to destroy the rights of some under the false banner of promoting the ‘civil rights’ of others.” Moreover, he accused President Johnson of encouraging the “spread of socialism at home and Communism abroad,” and compared the enforcement of the Civil Rights Act to the institution of slavery. According to Goldwater, the enforcement of the law would create a “police state” in the South.41

As in South Carolina, Goldwater’s passionate denunciation of the Civil Rights Act and his conservative reputation garnered him significant support throughout the South, but that popularity never translated to widespread endorsements outside of the region. It was clear throughout the campaign that Johnson was assured victory in the November election. Goldwater’s abrasive personality and penchant for presenting himself as an ideologue cost him votes in the west and mid-west regions. Unlike Richard Nixon four years earlier, Goldwater was unable to increase the GOP vote in the South without


alienating voters outside of the region. The certainty of a Democratic victory in the presidential election placed state politicians in a very difficult situation. As was the case in every presidential election since 1948, South Carolina Democrats who endorsed a candidate outside of their own party risked losing congressional seniority. Those who chose party loyalty risked voter alienation in their home state.  

Although Watson endorsed Goldwater and Thurmond switched parties, most South Carolina Democrats actually chose to support Johnson in the presidential race. Even First District Congressman Mendel Rivers chose to endorse the Democratic ticket. For politicians like Rivers, it seemed that race was no longer the only electoral concern. By the mid-1960s Rivers had joined a growing chorus of southern leaders who were unwilling to fight a losing battle that could result in irreparable harm to the state’s economy. Moreover, Rivers made sure that his constituents understood that fighting a last ditch effort to preserve Jim Crow would be a costly decision. In 1964 Rivers joined the “Lady Bird Special” at a campaign stop in Charleston. During the event the crowd jeered the first lady and drowned out any attempt to begin the proceedings. The crowd chanted in support of Johnson’s opponent, but Rivers quieted the unruly group when he boasted that many of them had Johnson to thank for their jobs in Charleston’s many military installations, and warned that, if Goldwater won, those jobs could be in jeopardy. Even though Goldwater promised to sustain or increase the nation’s Cold War military budget, Rivers worried that much of that spending would be relocated to a district belonging to a senior Republican congressman if the Arizona senator was victorious.  

course, Rivers was also aware that implicating the Republican in the potential loss of local defense dollars was an important political tactic regardless of whether or not the charges had any real merit. He told the crowd that he had no intention of abandoning the Democratic Party in the election and informed his audience that the last time he had left the party in support of a Republican, “The next thing I knew Fort Jackson was to be closed, the Navy Yard was non-existent, and the Air Base was to be skeletonized.”

Rivers’s determination to use his congressional seniority to continue to steer federal funds to the First District was also apparent in his criticisms of Thurmond’s decision to leave the Democratic Party. He declared Thurmond a “friend,” but warned that the senator had “made a mistake.” According to Rivers, the loss of Thurmond’s seniority within the Democratic Party would make it more difficult for the senator to bring federal money to South Carolina and to combat civil rights legislation. “I would rather recapture the party of my fathers than leave that party,” claimed Rivers, who added, “I would rather add to my seniority so I can fight the enemies of the south from a position of power.”

The congressman declared his loyalty was warranted because he believed that “the greater amount of good, honest, and efficient public service has been and will be rendered by Democratic office holders.”

Like Thurmond, Rivers was a committed segregationist, but by the mid-1960s the congressman had realized the futility of diehard resistance and was especially conscious of taking risks that might damage his ability to shape the federal defense budget. The congressman was poised to takeover as Chairman of the House Armed Services

43 News and Courier (October 9, 1964) 1B.

44 Untitled Speech (n.d.), from the Rivers Papers, SCHR.
Committee when congress reconvened in the spring of 1965. He wanted to make certain that his constituents understood his reasons for voting contrary to their wishes in the presidential contest and was worried that he might face serious Republican challenge in future elections. He claimed that the best way to prevent such opposition was to ensure that voters equated his re-election with the continuation of federal investment. In his defense Rivers proclaimed:

Look around. You can see the monuments you have enabled me to bring to Charleston and the lowcountry through my seniority within the Democratic Party – the Naval Shipyard, Polarisville, the nuclear deterrent capital of the world, the Minecraft Base, the Supply Center, the Air Force Base, our Marine Bases in the lowcountry, the entire sprawling military complex which is so vital to our economic growth. Additionally, we have a new Veterans hospital.

And who do you think brought Lockheed to Charleston – and Douglas to St. Stephens – and Continental to Walterboro? I can tell you, there will be others.45

Though most white political leaders understood Rivers’s motivations, some critics targeted the congressman for public scorn. Rivers had rarely faced harsh criticism from within the First Congressional District, but Goldwater was immensely popular in South Carolina, especially with black belt whites. Amongst his most ardent supporters were the editors of the Charleston News and Courier. In an editorial entitled “Betrayal of Heritage,” the Charleston newspaper criticized both Rivers and Senator Olin Johnston for supporting Johnson. The editorial demonstrated the way in which the race issue, even when it was unspoken, still shaped the terms of public discussions and debates. It charged that the two politicians had advocated “South Carolinians should vote according to handouts instead of convictions.” It also mocked the two Democrats by declaring that

45 Ibid.
it was “thankful that South Carolina did not have such leaders when the American
Revolution took place,” and by comparing them to Reconstruction era “scalawags.”

Apparently, most white South Carolinians agreed with the editors of the *News and
Courier* that Goldwater was the most acceptable candidate. He easily defeated Johnson
in South Carolina with nearly 60 percent of the popular vote. He overwhelmingly won
the white vote. Only in Mississippi (87.1%) and Alabama (69.5%) did Goldwater garner
a higher percentage. It was the first time since Reconstruction that South Carolina had
voted Republican in a presidential election but the fifth consecutive election in which the
black belt region had voted for a candidate other than the regular Democratic nominee.
In Charleston County alone, Goldwater won over two-thirds of the ballots.

As Rivers had predicted, sacrificing political expediency for party loyalty was
costly. Albert Watson, Rivers’s counterpart from the Second Congressional District, was
stripped of two years of his seniority for his campaign efforts on behalf of Goldwater.
Watson was furious. He resigned from office, changed his party affiliation, and ran for
re-election in a special contest as a Republican. His opponent, Preston Harvey Callison,
was a moderate Democrat who advocated compliance with the Civil Rights Act. Both
Spence and former Governor Byrnes endorsed Watson. Throughout the short campaign
Watson race-baited his opponent and his campaign circulated a pamphlet entitled “The
South is Under Attack” that was designed as both a repudiation of Democratic civil rights
initiatives and as an appeal to alienated whites. This strategy was successful and Watson
won with almost 70 percent of the popular vote. The victory, however, was a costly one.

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46 *News and Courier* (October 26, 1964) 8A.

Courier* (November 2, 1964) 8A.
Watston had lost much of his congressional authority and, after the election, he was a member of the minority party with little ability to steer official policy.\footnote{Hathorn, “Changing Politics of Race,” 230.}

Race was clearly the most important issue in these campaigns, but the argument that Goldwater (or Watson) supporters had exercised little more than a “protest vote” is superficial. For South Carolina’s emerging conservative Republican Party, the Goldwater campaign was more than a “last gasp” or a “final fling of standpat racists,” as contemporary observer Sam Ragain claimed. Granted, many Republican supporters were drawn to the GOP because of Goldwater’s denunciation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but Goldwater offered more than just a way to voice voter displeasure with the national Democratic Party. Goldwater and the conservative wing of the Republican Party offered another way of protecting white privilege without forcing a showdown with the federal executive branch. In February 1963 an article in the \textit{National Review} pointed out that “the Republican Party in the South is, in general, far less committed to all-out segregation than the Democrats.” Southern Republicans, according to the article:

\begin{quote}
Understand and accept the fact that they cannot dictate a national Republican platform – or candidate committed to segregation. They make, on the other hand, no apology for opposing the Warren Court’s breezy ventures in social pioneering – and it may well be that here they have something to teach conservatives of the North.\footnote{Sam Ragain, “Dixie Looked Away,” \textit{The American Scholar} (Spring 1965) 202-212. William A. Rusher, “Crossroads for the GOP,” \textit{National Review} (February 12, 1963) 109-112.}
\end{quote}

Though many white voters were undoubtedly drawn to Goldwater through a combination of rage and racism, it is important to note that the Republican Party platform actually called for an end to racial segregation. The more sophisticated members of the emerging Republican Party of South Carolina understood that, no matter what Goldwater...
desired, the national Republican Party would not endorse segregation and that, even
under a Republican administration, at least a minimum amount of desegregation would
occur, even in recalcitrant South Carolina. It was the GOP’s less forceful language and
willingness to settle for slow change that helped encourage Thurmond, Watson, Jenkins,
Spence and other segregationist Democrats to join the Republicans in an official capacity.
Goldwater may have been a protest candidate for some alienated southern whites, but on
the local level in South Carolina the growth of grass roots Republicanism signified the
desire of white professionals to find an alternative to massive resistance. In almost every
election between 1964 and 1980 the number of Republican candidates elected to local
and state offices increased in South Carolina. Long after the mis-characterized “protest
vote” of 1964, the GOP remained the voice of conservatism in the Palmetto State.

Nonetheless, Johnson’s re-election was a clear cut victory for civil rights activists
and an unmistakable defeat for segregationists, although the election results were not
unexpected. Johnson’s victory assured that, when the Civil Rights Act went into effect in
1965 the executive branch would insist on some form of compliance with the new law.
South Carolinians were especially concerned about school desegregation, but they also
resisted other portions of the Civil Rights Act. The debate over the public
accommodations requirements of the law had been one of the most contentious aspects of
the legislation’s road through congress. For many whites it was an unwelcome federal
intrusion on personal property rights. Nevertheless, it was the state’s acceptance of the
desegregation of public spaces that garnered it positive publicity and a reputation for
moderation.50

In South Carolina, the Civil Rights Act expedited a process that had been going on since the 1940s. The creeping desegregation of public spaces and workplaces during the 1950s and early 1960s had already eliminated many of the legal and economic tenets of Jim Crowism in South Carolina. By 1964 the federal government had already initiated the token desegregation of South Carolina’s numerous military bases, federal hospitals, and textile mills. Furthermore, African American economic protests and legal campaigns had forced the desegregation of many businesses and municipal parks. By 1964, whites in the state’s metropolitan areas were accustomed to some race-mixing at work, in shopping centers, and even in some restaurants.

One study of desegregation in Charleston noted that the week after President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act; African Americans ate at desegregated restaurants, visited desegregated city parks, and even stayed at hotels that were previously designated for whites only. Likewise, investigations of desegregation in Columbia and Greenville contend that desegregation in those cities was “Calm and Exemplary” and “Dignified.” Nonetheless, this kind of “voluntary” desegregation was enforced only as a last resort, and even then only to maintain civic order and to avoid economic disruption. In Greenville, one author observed, the “tone” of desegregation was “one of reluctant acquiescence.” Still, most whites in South Carolina in the mid-1960s did seem to be more amenable to token desegregation than their counterparts in Mississippi and Alabama. By the late 1960s, attempts to evade compliance with this portion of the Civil Rights Act were mostly limited to isolated events or to small rural enclaves.51

Although most white South Carolinians conceded that the Civil Rights Act was “the law of the land,” it is misleading to declare South Carolina’s compliance with the new law an unqualified success. There were several notable cases of continued popular resistance to the desegregation of restaurants and other public places. The most notorious example occurred when Columbia restaurateur Maurice Bessinger refused to desegregate his popular barbeque eateries. Only after a federal court order did he allow black customers to eat at his restaurants. Even then, Bessinger made certain to make the experience an uncomfortable one for African American patrons. His role as an apologist for the Confederacy and notable George Wallace supporter combined with the omnipresent displays of confederate flags and memorabilia at his Piggie Park eateries to ensure that black customers did not feel entirely welcome.\(^52\)

Though less colorful than Bessinger’s stand against the Civil Rights Act, a number of state hospitals also resisted desegregating their facilities. For example, Orangeburg’s public hospital enforced a rigid system of patient segregation until a federal court ordered that it desegregate and begin treating white and black patients equally. In Charleston, the private Roper Hospital sacrificed federal funding to remain segregated. Even though the rest of the city, including the hospital at the Medical College next door, had desegregated by the end of the 1960s, Roper remained segregated until a court ordered it to admit African American patients in 1970.\(^53\)


South Carolina’s most violent racial confrontation occurred over a violation of the Civil Rights Act in Orangeburg. As late as 1968, the city’s All Star Bowling Ally still refused to service black customers. In early February students from nearby Claflin College and South Carolina State University organized a protest. The students from these historically all-black colleges demanded that the facility comply with the nation’s civil rights laws. The situation became contentious by the second night of the protest and on February 8 1968 it became deadly. After a sheriff’s deputy fired into the air to disperse the crowd of black protesters several officers opened fire on the crowd itself. Three black students were killed and 27 were wounded. Although there were fewer overall injuries, the incident was more deadly than the riots at Ole Miss in 1962 that had sparked outrage across the country. As was often the case in circumstances of white on black violence in the South, nine patrolmen were tried in the case but all were acquitted by a South Carolina jury. The episode marked the most violent racial incident in South Carolina since the blinding of Isaac Woodward, and yet it received little publicity outside of the state. It was not until political reporter and native South Carolinian Jack Bass and fellow newsman Jack Nelson published *The Orangeburg Massacre* two years later that the confrontation received significant attention.54

The violent white response during the Orangeburg Massacre may not have been typical of white resistance in South Carolina during the period, but it was certainly an example of the unequal enforcement of the law in the Deep South. Most of the state’s resistance to integration was directed at preventing the full desegregation of South Carolina’s public school system while avoiding the kinds of racially motivated violence

that had typified the late 1950s. Journalists like George McMillan and historians like John Sproat and Paul Lofton have argued that this relative lack of violence in South Carolina was evidence that the state had accepted court ordered desegregation with “dignity.” This interpretation, however, under-emphasizes the fact that resistance to race-mixing in schools remained strong into the 1970s and that whites continued to utilize some of the traditional methods of massive resistance to slow black progress. For example, when A.J. Whittenberg of the Greenville NAACP filed a lawsuit to desegregate the city’s schools during the mid-1960s, he faced a well-orchestrated campaign of economic reprisals. His service station went out of business after clients refused to frequent the establishment. African American customers reported to Whittenberg that, if they were seen doing business with him, they risked being fired by their white employers. After his daughter, Elaine, began attending a previously all-white junior high school the family received threatening letters and phone calls. One letter enclosed a picture of Elaine that had been doctored to make it appear that a rope was around her neck. An attached note warned, “This is what will happen to her if she goes to a white school.”

As the Whittenberg case demonstrated, civil rights advocates still paid a heavy price for demanding equality. This kind of intimidation combined with persistent white opposition to meaningful compliance to ensure that school desegregation remained one of the most contested avenues for racial change in South Carolina. According to Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, school districts had to sign a HEW compliance form, prove that they were operating under a federal court order, or provide a voluntary desegregation plan that promised to desegregate four grades per year until complete desegregation was

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achieved. Title VI of the new law gave the HEW Office of Education (USOE) the authority to terminate federal funding from any school district found to be in violation of Title IV of the civil rights law. Moreover, the Civil Rights Act created new funding opportunities for desegregated school systems. The act authorized the United States Commissioner of Education to provide teacher training grants and other federal funding to assist school districts in making the transition to desegregated schools.56

Between 1965 and 1970, the state’s school districts walked a fine line between compliance with and violation of Title IV. South Carolina whites may have generally accepted the notion that they had no choice but to desegregate, but some resistance persisted in majority or near majority black districts. Only 42 of South Carolina’s 108 school districts met the HEW imposed deadline for completed compliance forms in March of 1965. Although 95 districts had submitted the forms two months later, the Office of Education deemed that more than 70 of those were inadequate.57

By 1967, 19 South Carolina districts had new federal funds deferred while district officials negotiated with the Office of Education. One district had its federal funding officially revoked. Calhoun County District Two, located in the town of Cameron, refused to submit a required compliance form to the Office of Education. In 1965, the public schools in Cameron enrolled just over 250 white students in one school and nearly 1000 African Americans in two schools. Unlike Charleston, Columbia, and Greenville, residential patterns and other pupil placement restrictions could not effectively minimize desegregation in Calhoun County. School Superintendent J.P. Dufford and the Board of

56 Ibid.

Trustees argued that “the district will be better served if its schools are operated without federal financial assistance on terms which are available.”\(^{58}\)

That kind of radical rejection of federal funding to preserve segregation, however, was short lived and costly in South Carolina. Monies allocated through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 created significant funding opportunities for local districts that met HEW requirements for desegregation. For example, after Richland County District One desegregated in 1965 it was awarded nearly $800,000 in new federal aid. In Cameron, on the other hand, Calhoun District Two forfeited nearly $14,000 in federal aid and became ineligible for nearly $150,000 in new aid available through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act when local leaders refused to comply with federal regulations. Despite the fact that most families with children in the district earned less than $2,000 a year, Calhoun County officials chose to raise property taxes by two mills to offset the loss of federal funding. A year later federal officials also announced that they would withhold $55,000 from the Elloree school system in Orangeburg District Seven and nearly $140,000 from Calhoun County District Two. These funding restrictions also impacted the state’s segregated colleges and universities. In July 1965, for instance, the College of Charleston, which had privatized in the late 1940s to avoid a desegregation lawsuit, became ineligible for the National Student Defense Loan program. The program had generated over $100,000 for the College of Charleston. In the previous academic year 65 students at the small school had borrowed $43,000 through the loan program. That same year, the Medical

College of South Carolina was ordered to suspend a training program at Roper Hospital or forfeit $16 million in federal aid.\textsuperscript{59}

To ensure proper funding, most districts did work to meet the bare minimum requirements allowed by the USOE, but they nearly always played a game of brinkmanship with federal regulations. By September 1965, even Summerton (Clarendon County District One), which was the home of the original \textit{Briggs v. Elliott} case and therefore specifically required by the \textit{Brown} rulings to desegregate “with all deliberate speed,” finally desegregated. Nowhere in South Carolina had resistance to desegregation been more intense than in Clarendon County, and yet, local officials complied with a federal court order from Judge Charles E. Simons, Jr. to allow the transfer of five black students to the previously lily white high school for the fall semester. So long as the racial balance in any one school heavily favored whites, and no white students were forced to become a small minority in a public school, whites seemed increasingly willing to trade minimal compliance for public order and heavy federal investment. By 1965, nearly one-third of the funding for Clarendon District One ($216,000) came from the federal government. Moreover, the situation in Summerton was far from unique. By 1968 it was clear that the state’s reliance on congressionally allocated education funds had dramatically altered the state-federal relationship and diminished South Carolina’s ability to reject HEW demands. In sum, the federal government allocated funding that exceeded $33 million to South Carolina’s public school system in 1968 alone.\textsuperscript{60}


\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Southern Education Report} (September-October, 1965) 32, (November, 1967) 15.
On the surface, South Carolina’s move from open defiance of *Brown* to acceptance of federally mandated desegregation appeared remarkable. The state’s politicians reveled in self-congratulatory rhetoric and, after the first full year of public school desegregation, Governor Robert E. McNair declared that “South Carolinians have proven their determination to maintain law and order during the recent years of transition.” He urged black and white South Carolinians to “conduct themselves with dignity and restraint.” Local school boards followed the governor’s lead and, by 1966, all but two of South Carolina’s school districts had either submitted compliance forms to HEW officials or were operating under a court order to desegregate their public schools. The eventual compliance with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act made it seem that South Carolina was well on its way to desegregating its public school system, but the reality of the situation was far more complicated. 61

Nearly every district operated under a “freedom of choice” plan that harkened back to some of the very first legalistic responses to *Brown* in South Carolina and across the South. Under the freedom of choice system, which had first been touted as resistance tactic by state officials like David W. Robinson and Hollings in the immediate post-*Brown* period, African Americans were free to apply for a transfer to a previously whites only school. School officials claimed that they would not base their decisions on the basis of race, but most districts used such plans to prevent or severely limit black enrollment in white schools. Ninety-two of South Carolina’s 108 school districts

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operated under such plans in 1966. Because of those plans, less than 4,000 of South Carolina’s nearly 264,000 black students attended desegregated schools that year.62

Initially, freedom of choice was accepted by federal regulators. However, integrationists, such as M. Hayes Mizell of the American Friends Service Committee, argued that the plans were superficial mechanisms for giving the impression of compliance while simultaneously preserving the dual school system. Mizell complained that freedom of choice was “ineffective because the burden has been primarily on the Negro parents and it is only with their decision to send their children to predominately white schools that these institutions have been desegregated.” According to Mizell, distrust of white officials, fear of reprisals, trepidation over social ostracism, and the continued segregation of “private” after-school activities, such as team sports, enforced a policy of “tokenism” and “gradualism” and allowed the basic structure of Jim Crow education to persist.63

The evidence suggests that Mizell’s concerns were valid. In 1964, only 55 black students attended desegregated schools in Greenville County, 84 black students attended such schools in Charleston, 22 in Columbia, and 28 in Orangeburg. As of January 1966, 80 percent of South Carolina’s 108 school districts were in compliance with HEW regulations (as opposed to 40 percent a year earlier) and 88 percent of the state’s public school students attended schools in districts with at least token desegregation, but less

62 Ibid.
than one and a half percent of black children attended school with whites. A year later, that figure was still below six percent.\textsuperscript{64}

Whites consistently used bureaucratic procedures, careful transfer decisions, and gerrymandered districts to assure minimal compliance with HEW requirements. For instance, in Greenville, residential patterns guaranteed that, for the 1966-67 school year, only 26 of the county’s 98 schools were desegregated. Even in those schools, the 308 black children attending schools with whites paled in comparison to the white enrollment of almost 19,000. In Orangeburg County’s most desegregated district (District Eight), 311 black students enrolled with 3,215 whites. In seven of Orangeburg’s eight districts, the number of African Americans attending previously white only schools numbered under 35. This limited enrollment was despite the fact that Orangeburg was a majority black county.\textsuperscript{65}

In many cases white officials simply refused to grant transfers to African American students and even when such requests were granted, black students were left to feel like isolated minorities in mostly white schools. For the start of the 1966-7 school year, less than 15,000 black students attended desegregated schools with almost 400,000 whites. Over 230,000 African American public school students remained in segregated schools. In other words, two full years after the Civil Rights Act took effect 94 percent of black children in South Carolina were educated in Jim Crow schools. The situation was worse in South Carolina’s public colleges. Excluding the predominately African American

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South Carolina State, only 169 black college students attended state schools compared to almost 23,000 whites.\textsuperscript{66}

Throughout the state, but especially in the rural black belt, white administrators frequently and systematically violated Titles IV and VI and ignored HEW regulations. In one egregious case in the Dorchester County town of Summerville a school official told a black parent that the “new federal guidelines” did not apply to “rural districts.” In another example, Mizell, who was a graduate of the University of South Carolina, reported that the Orangeburg District Two Board of Trustees refused to grant a transfer request based on academic aptitude. In the fall of 1964, Cheraw illegally rejected 25 transfer requests for missing an unpublished deadline. The rejection was despite the upcoming target date for complying with Title IV of the Civil Rights Act. The following year, even though nearly all of South Carolina’s school districts had technically complied with the Civil Rights Act, Bishopville High School and Manning High School cancelled varsity football games with St. Johns High School because St. Johns had one black player.\textsuperscript{67}

Though state and local leaders often preached against the intimidation of African Americans whose children attended desegregated schools, several reports of threatening phone calls and economic intimidation were reported throughout the state. In Blackville, Superintendent Arnold W. Heiting reminded local whites that “The choice of schools for students has been made by law, a law passed by the federal government, and it is not our

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.

own choice,” and warned against whites “trying to take the law into their own hands” after students and teachers reported a rash of phone threats. One Williamsburg County family was forced to withdraw a transfer request after being told that they would lose their rented land if their child attended a desegregated school.68

However, the most common remnant from the repertoire of intractable massive resistance was the creation of private segregated academies. Recognizing that the state had no option but to comply with federal desegregation orders, some white South Carolinians, especially those who lived in majority or near majority black school districts, finally established a system of segregated private schools. In doing so, many whites gained a new confidence in their ability to avoid the full impact of federally mandated desegregation.

In June 1964, just a few months after Orangeburg County announced that it would begin the process of desegregating its schools, a group of whites formed a private academy to serve the community’s white students who did not wish to attend desegregated public schools. The group included several wealthy whites, such as Frank Best and T. Elliot Wannamaker. Best, whose Orangeburg radio station, WDIX, broadcasted Citizens’ Council programming, had been a part of an earlier attempt by members of the White Citizens’ Councils to establish a private school system. Wannamaker, who owned a chemical company, also had ties to the Citizens’ Councils of America. Committed white segregationists formed similar schools throughout the rest of

the state. Between 1963 and 1966 28 new segregated private schools formed in South Carolina and by 1967 there were 44 such academies in the state.69

The General Assembly was supportive of these developments and encouraged other majority black districts to do the same. Before the Civil Rights Act could take effect state lawmakers passed the Tuition Grants Bill. It allocated $250,000 to pay tuition grants to parents whose children attended secular private schools during the 1964-65 academic year. Under the new legislation, students were awarded an amount equal to the per pupil expenditures allocated by the state to South Carolina’s public schools.70

Support for private schools, however, was limited principally to fervent segregationists in black belt districts. In July 1964 a group of white ministers, mostly from the upstate, announced that they would not allow the use of church property for secular private schools. Although the group was relatively small, the lack of public outrage was a stark contrast to the state’s violent reaction to the publication of South Carolinians Speak in 1957. Likewise, professional educators also voiced opposition to private school vouchers and discouraged white flight from the public school system. Southern School News concluded that South Carolina’s teachers overwhelmingly opposed the private school tuition grants. Education professionals understood that many of the state’s schools were already under-funded and recognized that, if state legislators began to think of public schools as “black schools,” education funding was in serious jeopardy. Concern over funding was particularly strong in rural districts. In Orangeburg,
for example, the exodus of white students from the public system led to a drop in enrollment. Since state funding was based on per pupil expenditures, the drop in public school enrollment led to a reduction in state funding. According to Orangeburg Superintendent H.A. Roberts Jr., it was up to the county to account for the lost revenue. “What happened here,” he alleged, “is that the district now is bearing the expenses of keeping the teachers to offer a full curriculum.”71

African Americans also opposed the creation of private segregated schools in South Carolina. Within a month of the passage of the Tuition Bill, Matthew Perry and the NAACP legal team secured an injunction that prevented the state from awarding the grant money to parents. In October 1964, the United States Department of Justice joined the suit. Perry and justice department attorneys argued that the grants were an unconstitutional attempt to avoid compliance with *Brown v. Board of Education*. On May 31, 1968, the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the Tuition Grants Act was illegal.72

Though discouraged, private school proponents were determined to move forward without financial assistance from the state. Within a year of the founding of Wade Hampton Academy in Orangeburg, a group of more than 20 private schools formed a statewide association and began the process of applying for a state charter. Though the private segregated schools enrolled less than 5,000 students compared to more than 660,000 in the public schools, the private academies were concentrated in the rural black belt where school aged black children significantly outnumbered their white counterparts.

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Only Mississippi and Alabama had more segregated academies than South Carolina, and only Louisiana and Virginia had more white private school students. Unlike South Carolina, each of these states provided tuition grants to help parents pay private school tuition. Despite the lack of official state assistance, Wannamaker hoped that the number of whites enrolled in private schools would increase as the federal government began to insist on more than token desegregation. “The heavier the hand of Washington on the public schools,” he warned, “the more rapid the growth of private schools will be.” Even education professionals who argued that the growth of private schools was motivated by a desire for “better schools,” acknowledged that enrollment in these institutions were directly linked to desegregation. G. Thomas Turnipseed, the Executive Secretary of the South Carolina Independent School Association and a campaign officer in George Wallace’s 1968 presidential campaign, admitted that “the integration and increased federal control of the schools was the impetus for the private-school movement. Without it, the movement would have never gotten off the ground.”

Since race, and not education, was the primary motivation for the formation of these schools, the quality of the faculty and the facilities of South Carolina’s segregated academies varied tremendously. For example, Wade Hampton Academy in Orangeburg was a well financed school located on a scenic campus. Thanks to donations from wealthy whites, such as Wannamaker and Best, the 600 students at Wade Hampton enjoyed a 10 acre campus valued at over $300,000 for only $300 a year in tuition. Meanwhile, the segregated private school in Summerton had about 100 students who attended classes in the education building of the First Baptist Church, in a nearby mobile

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home, or in a private residence near the church. The school’s limited budget meant that students in 12 grades had to attend classes with only 11 full time teachers. The conditions of some new private schools were even worse. State Superintendent of Education Cyril Busbee joked, “All you have to do to open a private school in South Carolina is to have a spare stable.”

The lure of the segregated academies became more pronounced in the late 1960s as federal regulators began to dismantle the lingering bureaucratic hurdles to desegregation in South Carolina. HEW authorities and federal judges had tolerated freedom of choice so long as such plans fostered an increase in public school desegregation, which was not hard to demonstrate given the paucity of any integration before the mid-1960s. In 1966, HEW director Harold Howe II proclaimed that freedom of choice was illegal unless it promised to lead to substantial race-mixing in local schools. By 1968, the Office of Education became frustrated with the South’s unwillingness to move beyond token desegregation. HEW argued that districts should take action to create unitary school districts in which each school had a racial balance that reflected the statistical make-up of the area. Federal authorities were well aware that gerrymandered districts and residential segregation had prevented progress toward true integration and, in February 1968, HEW declared that 21 South Carolina counties had not made satisfactory progress toward desegregation. Of course, the fact that HEW’s idea of “progress” was ill-defined and often open to negotiation with local leaders limited the effectiveness of such a mandate. According to the Office of Education, the freedom of choice plans governing the districts had not achieved enough desegregation to meet the standards dictated in Title IV, but

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HEW announced that only four of the 21 districts would receive no federal funding until the situation was remedied. The others were able to prolong negotiations with federal authorities without providing meaningful desegregation.75

Peter Libassi, the Director of the HEW Office of Civil Rights argued that the agency “had to follow the freedom-of-choice plan to prove its ineffectiveness,” but is more likely that HEW and the USOE had become frustrated with the white South’s ability to use freedom of choice as a tool of resistance. Mizell argued that the South had used the plans to maintain “tokenism and gradualism.” He pointed out:

In a region whose history has been an anathema to freedom of choice, it has been interesting to observe the conversion of political and educational leaders who now contend that each child has the freedom to choose whichever school he wants to attend. The dual school system, they say, is at an end. Yet, thousands of Negro parents and their children know that the dual system is still very much a part of Southern education, and in South Carolina alone 93 per cent of the Negro school children are in segregated schools today. 76

Libassi’s concerns were finally addressed by the Supreme Court in May 1968. In Green v. County School Board of New Kent County, Virginia, the court ruled that freedom of choice plans were an unconstitutional effort to avoid compliance with Brown v. Board of Education. The following year, in Alexander v. Holmes County Board of Education, Mississippi, the Supreme Court ruled that counties must form unitary school districts that placed students based on residence, and not by race. These decisions should have caused the belated death of dual systems of schooling in the South. However, white officials in Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, and South Carolina’s other metropolitan areas were confident that residential segregation and racially gerrymandered school


districts would limit race-mixing to an “acceptable” level. By contrast, in small towns such as Cameron, which had only three public schools, the elimination of freedom of choice meant that white students would be outnumbered by a ratio of more than three to one. Rather than send their children to integrated schools where whites were a minority, white parents simply removed their children from the public school system. In 1968, no white student attended a public school in Cameron. Whites either transferred to other districts under rules first established in the mid-1950s as part of the state’s massive resistance campaign, or to Wade Hampton Academy in nearby Orangeburg.77

White Orangeburg parents were so concerned over the possibility of a black majority in integrated public schools that they formed an organization called Help Orangeburg Public Education (HOPE). Unlike similar organizations, like the open schools movement in Virginia or around Atlanta, Georgia, HOPE worked to preserve freedom of choice and then disintegrated when that became impossible. According to the organization, it was the only way to protect education in the rural county. Its members understood that if African American students became the majority in county schools, whites would pull their children out of those schools. The organization foundered once it became clear that the federal government would enforce the Supreme Court’s ruling against freedom of choice plans.78

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While the schools were still mostly segregated, whites once again looked for a political solution that would assist the state in managing its desegregation process in a way congenial to white needs. White South Carolinians may have surrendered *de jure* segregation, but they were not going to give up on freedom of choice easily and looked for candidates who would accept minimal compliance. However, the political climate had changed significantly and white segregationists no longer held complete control of the electoral process. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the committed efforts of black activists like Modjeska Simkins to register black voters had helped the increase the power of black ballots to the point where African Americans now represented more than 200,000 voters and 35 percent of the electorate. Moreover, white defections to the Republican Party had left many state Democrats dependent on these new African American votes. In 1968, Democratic Governor Robert McNair went so far as to enroll his daughter in a desegregated public school in Columbia, a gesture that symbolized his party’s new reliance on biracial moderate politics. By the time the Republican National Convention nominated Richard Nixon as its candidate for the presidency in 1968 and George Wallace announced his candidacy as an independent, it seemed like the white vote might be divided enough to ensure a Democratic victory in South Carolina that would usher in a new era of racial moderation. In any event, it seemed to most South Carolinians that the election would determine the extent to which the state would be required to move beyond token desegregation. Of course, it would also give white Democrats a clear indication of the true depths of the white defection to the GOP.

By the time of the election most white South Carolinians had acquiesced on minimal segregation. Therefore, the key issue for them was how and to what extent
desegregation would be enforced in the state. As was the case throughout the nation, this issue typically revolved around the issue of busing. During the campaign Nixon assured Thurmond’s key strategist Harry Dent that he did not favor forced busing as a means of enforcing desegregation. In doing so, Nixon left open an opportunity for whites to continue the use of district gerrymandering and pupil placement restrictions to limit school desegregation. The GOP candidate also met with Senator Thurmond and promised to appoint “strict constructionists” for Supreme Court vacancies and to find a way to allow freedom of choice to continue. These pledges promised to limit the federal government’s regulatory control over school desegregation and the threat of continued federal court demands for meaningful desegregation.79

In return for Nixon’s commitment to scaling back federal interference with school desegregation, Thurmond pledged to campaign for the GOP nominee in the primary and general elections. The endorsement of the senator gave Nixon instant credibility with white southerners. However, the independent candidacy of Alabama governor and ultra-segregationist George Wallace provided an alternative for hardcore whites that threatened to divide the white vote and ensure a Democratic victory in the general election. Thurmond and Dent tried to limit Wallace’s appeal in South Carolina with a series of newspaper, radio, and television advertisements that instructed voters that a vote for the independent would put Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey in the White House, but they were unable to convince many working class whites that the former member of the NAACP was a true conservative who would defend white rights.80

Thanks mostly to the vigorous campaigning of Dent and Thurmond, Nixon won South Carolina, but, as GOP strategists had feared, his victory exposed an acutely divided white electorate and demonstrated the significant power of black ballots. The three presidential candidates nearly divided the state’s votes evenly – only 38 percent of voters cast their ballots for Nixon while 32 percent voted for Wallace and nearly 30 percent supported Humphrey. Though he won a plurality, Nixon’s inability to secure a majority or near majority vote confirmed that, when given a choice, hardcore segregationists would continue to support the most racially conservative candidate in any election, irrespective of party affiliation. Nixon’s endorsement of gradualism and conservative judicial appointments was popular with middle class whites in South Carolina’s major cities – a group that prized “law and order” and limits on federal activism – but it also alienated working class whites across the state who had chosen to endorse Wallace’s particular brand of racism and economic populism. Other Republicans took notice of these results and concluded that without a unified white vote they had no hope of defeating the cautiously, but increasingly biracial Democratic Party that had emerged in the South in the wake of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.81

National elections aside, in state contests the Democratic Party still held significant advantages in South Carolina. With nearly uniform black support and a solid foundation of white Democratic loyalists, the South Carolina Democratic Party had a more stable political base than its GOP counterpart. Though conservative Republicans had managed to lure the support of a white plurality in statewide elections, they had not consistently been able to overcome these Democratic advantages. Within this context, the Republican

nominee for governor in 1970, Albert Watson, hoped that a combination of Nixon and Wallace voters would end the Democratic control of the governor’s office that had been unbroken since Reconstruction. In order to accomplish that goal Watson vigorously denounced federal desegregation policy and engaged in a blatant race-baiting campaign against his Democratic opponent, Lieutenant Governor John West.82

In sum, Watson’s strategy was a combination of critiquing the Supreme Court for ruling against freedom of choice plans, accusing West of sacrificing local control and states rights for the benefits of black bloc voting, and promising to fight to the bitter end against federal control of the state’s desegregation. Furthermore, he frequently wore a white tie to symbolize his support for his white segregationist constituents and utilized Wallace-like rhetoric that reminded voters of his militant segregationist past.83

West and his Democratic allies worried that the relatively new biracial political alliance was not strong enough to ward off Watson’s relentless attacks and were concerned that Thurmond’s endorsement of the GOP nominee would be impossible to overcome. West, who did not share Watson’s flair or charisma, called for voters to support the same kind of steady leadership that had navigated the state during the desegregation crises with minimal bloodshed – and also minimal desegregation. West hoped that voters would recognize that the Democratic Party had managed the problem of desegregation with every available resource without resorting to the kind of unproductive demagoguery associated with Georgia under Lester Maddox and Wallace’s Alabama.84


83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.
Democratic leaders understood that most white South Carolinians (and their black neighbors) took pride in the state’s peaceful reputation during the turbulent process of desegregation, but they also worried that white outrage over the end of freedom of choice schooling would give Watson the edge in the election. Pre-election polling data indicated that the vast majority of South Carolinians were unhappy with forced desegregation, but also demonstrated that a plurality had concluded that it had not been as bad as feared. West and his supporters hoped that white voters would recognize that the state’s Democratic leadership had made the inevitable more palatable and refuse to allow Watson’s race-baiting to alter the state’s commitment to conservative measured change. Moreover, he urged voters to ignore outrageous Republican promises, such as a pledge to save freedom of choice, that Watson was simply incapable of keeping.  

The political differences between Watson and West were encapsulated in their attitudes toward busing and the effect of Watson’s campaign against it. Shortly after declaring his candidacy Watson spoke at an anti-busing rally in Lamar. On February 22, 1970 he and 2,500 white protesters called on Darlington County to resist any further federal pressure to integrate its public school system through the use of busing. Watson appealed to the county’s white population to resist forced busing to the bitter end and use every means at its disposal to forestall federal pressures for meaningful change. Shortly after the rally another protest turned violent when a mob of angry whites overturned two school buses that had carried black children to a newly desegregated school. The incident brought national attention to the debate over busing in South Carolina. Yet, despite widespread criticism for stirring up white emotions, Watson’s campaign did not

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85 Ibid.
desist from courting further controversy. Several months later the principal of A.C. Flora High School near Columbia, the mayor of nearby Forest Acres, the Columbia Police Department, and Governor McNair accused Watson campaign aides of instigating a racial fight at the high school so that Watson could exploit the issue for political purposes. The two violent eruptions were enough to convince some white moderates that Watson’s inflammatory style would bring unwanted attention to South Carolina and generate unwelcome poor publicity.86

Outrage over these episodes combined with near uniform black support to help West win the election with 52 percent of the popular vote. However, Watson won an overwhelming majority of the white vote. Less than half of West’s votes came from white voters. Therefore, the election results were an indication that the majority of white South Carolinians were still inclined to support the continued defiance of federal desegregation orders. However, the outcome of the election further confirmed the newfound power of black ballots in the wake of the Voting Rights Act and proved definitively that overtly racist campaigning was a losing strategy in South Carolina. Some Republicans, such as Arthur Ravenel of Charleston, had argued even before the election that the state’s GOP could not overcome its Democratic opponents on a consistent basis unless it abandoned its blatant racism. Moreover, Ravenel, among others, called on the Republican Party to reach out to black voters. The GOP, he claimed, could not win while only campaigning to just 65 percent of the registered voters. More importantly, Ravenel understood that merely approaching black voters (whether or not

86 Ibid.
African Americans actually did vote for GOP candidates) would soften the party’s image among white moderates who shared the GOP’s economic and moral agenda.87

In sum, the Watson-West election had taught the same lesson to white racial conservatives that the 1968 presidential contests had taught George Wallace: race-baiting and overt white supremacy could still capture a white plurality in the Deep South, but it might also alienate enough white voters to ensure electoral defeat. Watson, like Wallace, learned that, in South Carolina, a racist campaign would lure scores of loyal voters but it would also create a sizable biracial voting bloc for the opposition. His election defeat, therefore, signaled the end of massive resistance in South Carolina. Without the ability to control state politics, segregationist whites simply could not prevent a discernable moderation of racial politics. Racially conservative but less overt forms of white politicking would continue in South Carolina, but the context within which it existed and operated was significantly changed after 1970.

87 Ibid.
Contrary to many apocalyptic predictions from the 1950s, the limited desegregation of South Carolina’s schools during the second half of the 1960s did not result in widespread, uncontrollable violence, rampant intermarriage, or the complete failure of the state’s public schools and colleges to function effectively. Generally, if often reluctantly, whites acquiesced on the issue of desegregation and refused to fight a futile battle against unbeatable odds. The generation that controlled the state in the three decades after World War II did not, however, endorse the concept of racial integration and utilized every available device to protect white privilege. So long as gerrymandering and residential segregation kept the black student population at individual schools around one-third or less, whites seemed content to rely on covert and informal racism as the primary mechanism for limiting black progress. In areas where such tactics were impractical or downright impossible, whites simply abandoned the public school system. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s the number of private, mostly segregated schools in South Carolina grew from 16 to over 200. By 1975, almost eight percent of the state’s school age children were educated in private schools – the highest percentage in the South.\(^\text{598}\)

Summerton offers a salutary example of this trend. By 1974, white public school enrollment had dwindled to just one student. In an indication that the small town’s

intense racial divide persisted beyond the 1970s, Clarendon Hall, the local private school, waited until 2000 to enroll its first black student and had expanded that number to a mere five African American children by 2004. During that time, African American enrollment in Summerton’s Scott’s Branch High School hovered at around 95 percent even though close to 40 percent of the town’s population was white. In other words, in the birthplace of the original Briggs case, segregated education has persisted for more than 50 years after the United States Supreme Court demanded that Clarendon County District One desegregate.599

As the situation in Summerton suggests, the state’s resistance to court ordered desegregation has had lasting consequences that continue to impact race relations in South Carolina. Nevertheless, it has enjoyed a positive reputation for its actions during the desegregation crises of the civil rights era. Several influential essays on desegregation in South Carolina have concluded approvingly that state leaders voluntarily abandoned their resistance campaign in 1963 and negotiated with black leaders to cultivate a “pragmatic accommodation” of court ordered desegregation. A closer examination of the state’s official actions and white extralegal intimidation, however, complicates this laudatory interpretation of events. Granted, violent racial extremism was less frequent in South Carolina than in Mississippi and Alabama – particularly during the turbulent years of 1962 and 1963 – but, as this dissertation demonstrates, an investigation of massive resistance in all of its various forms reveals that the state’s

ability to delay the desegregation of its public schools and colleges longer than every other southern state was the result of the white population’s determination to preserve as much of the unequal racial caste system as it could.\textsuperscript{600}

Historians and scholars have routinely underestimated South Carolina’s capacity for creating and managing the most successful massive resistance campaign in the nation. Between 1950 and 1970 opposition to desegregation in South Carolina was comprised of a flexible and dynamic array of formal strategies and informal arrangements that were negotiated and acted upon by a white population that overwhelmingly endorsed Jim Crow. Even as late as 1970, for example, white voters delivered most of their ballots to hardcore segregationist and anti-busing activist Albert Watson principally because, like Watson, 68 percent of the state’s white population still professed a belief in segregation.\textsuperscript{601}

Even though Watson lost that election, white efforts to preserve economic and educational advantages between 1950 and 1970 were largely successful. After two decades of nearly unchecked, if constantly evolving massive resistance, it was clear that whites had, indeed, retained many of the benefits of white supremacy. In 1972, for instance, more than 50 percent of the African Americans in South Carolina still lived below the poverty line and earned less than half the average income of their white

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counterparts. Moreover, most of the state’s best and highest paying jobs were still held almost exclusively by whites – almost 13 percent of whom were employed in managerial or administrative fields while less than two percent African Americans were white-collar workers. These problems were most acute in South Carolina’s black belt areas. In the Low Country, for example, nearly half of the black population lived in homes with deficient or no indoor plumbing. In fact, the discrepancy between the state’s generally positive reputation and its enduring patterns of racial inequality was so severe that, after visiting South Carolina’s coastal plain, psychologist Robert Coles declared in 1968 that, “no southern state can match South Carolina’s ability to resist the claims of its black people without becoming the object of national scorn.”

Coles’s assessment of the state was further evidence of the paradoxical relationship between reputation and reality in South Carolina. As was the case throughout the South, white South Carolinians were sometimes caustic and even brutal when confronted with black demands for equality. Characterizations otherwise are largely due to the fact that demagoguery and violence were only small parts of the state’s multifaceted and resourceful defense of Jim Crow. Incidents such as the blinding of Isaac Woodward and the Orangeburg Massacre indicate the willingness of some whites to engage in violent reprisals, but the deliberate planning of the Gressette Committee, the creative and discriminatory lawmaking of the General Assembly, the unequal enforcement of state

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laws by the judicial branch, and the widespread use of red-baiting and economic intimidation were more characteristic examples of the resistance tactics that served whites in South Carolina so well. South Carolina’s various strategies for forestalling desegregation and limiting black progress may have relied less heavily on officially sanctioned white terrorism than was the case in Birmingham, Alabama or in Mississippi, but they were also more effective.

Only after South Carolina’s political and economic leadership determined that the state could not resist African American demands for equality while simultaneously preserving public order did a sizable proportion of the white population endorse a policy of minimal and carefully managed compliance. Even then, local resistance remained steadfast until it became apparent that the financial risks of non-compliance would create an unwelcome fiscal burden. This change in official white policy was not voluntary but mostly a result of two interconnected phenomena. First, the state’s insurgent black citizens engaged in a determined legal and political campaign to undermine Jim Crow, and, second, the federal government – largely due to pressure from African Americans – finally demanded desegregation and threatened to withhold funding if the southern states failed to comply.

Beginning with John Wrighten’s efforts to integrate the College of Charleston in 1943-44, black South Carolinians challenged segregated education for 20 years before finally forcing the state to desegregate its public schools and universities. At the same time, African Americans also engaged in a relentless legal campaign that contested the state’s denial of black civil and voting rights. After the Supreme Court effectively overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* in the *Brown* decision, the pace of these challenges
increased and combined with various direct action campaigns and dogged political organizing to confront and confound white resisters. By the mid-1960s those efforts had ushered in a new era of black political agency that was demonstrated by a dramatic increase in black voting. In 1952 there were fewer than 90,000 registered black voters. By 1966 that number had increased to roughly 200,000, which represented just over 20 percent of the total electorate. Largely due to the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the persistent efforts of black activists like Modjeska Simkins to register African Americans, the number of black ballots increased to more than 220,000 (or 35 percent of all voters) by 1970.\textsuperscript{603}

This expansion in voting rights had two important consequences. First, it helped form a new biracial political alliance that undermined massive resistance. This new coalition allowed (and sometimes forced) white politicians like Third District Congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn to abandon their positions as devout segregationists and reach out African Americans for political support. Second, the rise in black political participation directly resulted in the election of African Americans to state and local offices for the first time since Reconstruction. In 1972 there were 61 black elected officials in South Carolina including three black legislators and two black mayors. That number increased dramatically after the United States Supreme Court struck down the state’s unequal system of representation in \textit{Stevenson v. West} in 1973.\textsuperscript{604}


\textsuperscript{604} \textit{Ibid}. Edgar, \textit{South Carolina}, 551.
Of course, this new black political power was only part of the equation that finally, if equivocally transformed racial relations in South Carolina. Unlike the governors of Arkansas, Alabama, and Mississippi, the moderate leadership of Governors Hollings and Russell had managed to accomplish South Carolina’s initial desegregation without the use of federal force. And yet, as this dissertation explains, that process was, nonetheless, inseparable from the specter of federal power. Even before the filing of the Briggs case in 1950, white leaders worried that any federal interests in black civil and voting rights would imperil funding to the state from Washington D.C. It was the weight of those concerns that eventually forced local white leaders to relax the state’s Jim Crow restrictions. For instance, until federal regulators threatened to withhold congressionally allocated education monies in 1968, less than two percent of the state’s black students attended desegregated schools. Even though most schools still had a sizable white majority, it is revealing that six years later, more than 90 percent of South Carolina’s black school age children attended school with at least some whites. In 1971 national agencies contributed over $30 million in direct payments to cotton growers and $84 million for “farm income stabilization” – nearly all of which went to South Carolina’s rural districts and disproportionately benefited white rural landowners.605

Most of the state’s federal income, however, was directed at South Carolina’s more populated areas where defense installations were the largest employers. Nearly half of the federal funds spent in South Carolina originated from the military budget or the Atomic Energy Commission in 1971. In the First Congressional District, which included almost the entire Low Country region, 35 percent of the total payroll, or more than $460

605 Ibid.
million, came from defense-related employment or associated industries that were entirely dependent on military spending. In Charleston, the district’s largest city, the United States Department of Defense spent $800 for every person (compared to a national average of less than $300). Overall, the federal government spent nearly one billion dollars in the First District in 1971 and even racially conservative white leaders were simply unwilling to jeopardize that arrangement in the name of Jim Crow.606

The combination of these concerns and the changing political landscape in South Carolina and across the region effectively ended the kinds of hardcore resistance that had typified South Carolina’s defense of Jim Crow in the 1950s. Yet, while the state’s volatile coalition of segregationists did crack under these pressures, it is important to note that even after the combination of black activism and federal intercession had undermined white resistance to desegregation, the state’s commitment to thoroughgoing racial change was, nonetheless, circumscribed. Moderate leaders, such as Hollings and Charles Daniel may have sanctioned token desegregation at a time when other prominent southerners, such as George Wallace, Lester Maddox, and Ross Barnett, would not, but they, like most rank and file South Carolinians, still opposed efforts to dismantle the state’s system of Jim Crow laws completely. Though the actions of moderate whites like Hollings and liberal activists like Hayes Mizell have elicited some praise from journalists, politicians, and historians alike, scholars should be mindful that, even after federal intervention and black political agency rendered the politics and practice of massive resistance impotent, whites retained many of the educational and economic advantages that had allowed white supremacy to flourish in the first place.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John White was born in Charleston, West Virginia. After growing up in South Carolina, he moved to Virginia where he graduated from Stuarts Draft High School. He attended Bridgewater College and graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor’s degree in political science. He earned a master’s degree in history from the College of Charleston in 1999. His master’s thesis was titled: “‘Straddling the Fence’: South Carolina Congressman L. Mendel Rivers in the Second Reconstruction, 1941-1971.” He then entered the doctoral program at the University of Florida and received his Ph.D. in May of 2006. Along with serving as a graduate teaching assistant, John had served as an adjunct professor of history at the College of Charleston and as an archivist in the College of Charleston Library.