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Rhetoric, Realism, and Response:

*Brown*, White Opposition, and Black Youth Activism, 1954-1972

By

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# Rhetoric, Realism, and Response:

# *Brown*, White Opposition, and Black Youth Activism, 1954-1972

By

Vincent D. Willis

M.A., The Ohio State University, 2007

B.A., Morehouse College, 2003

Advisor: Vanessa Siddle Walker, Ed.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the

James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University

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Doctor of Philosophy

in Educational Studies

2013

# Abstract

Rhetoric, Realism, and Response:
*Brown*, White Opposition, and Black Youth Activism, 1954-1972

By Vincent Willis

A prevailing narrative of America's educational history is that public education for black youth has constantly improved since the mid-twentieth century. The most notable case used to substantiate this claim is *Brown v. Board of Education*. Academicians constantly debate the successes and failures of *Brown* but few have examined the cyclical relationship between the rhetoric of *Brown*, the educational realities of black youth, and the ways the youth responded juxtaposed with the activities of those who wanted the status quo to remain in place. To fill this gap, this study examines how *Brown*, white opposition, and black youth activism created a farrago of progress, regress, hopes and doubts that greatly influenced public education in Georgia from 1954-1972. Framed within the context of *Brown* and informed by multiple archival sources and oral history interviews, this study is guided by four research questions:

1) What ways did the rhetoric of *Brown* compare and contrast with the educational realities of black youth after the Supreme Court's ruling?

2) What effect did white opposition have on the educational realities of black students?

3) How did black youth respond to the educational inequities and white opposition they faced during the post-*Brown* era?

4) What was the relationship between Civil Rights and Black Power organizations and the activism of black youth?

I use newspapers, archival collections, and interviews to provide an overview of the national and local context of youth activism and three case studies from towns in Georgia to illustrate local people's responses. Results indicate that the youth were focused more on improving how they were being treated and improving the conditions of their schools than they were in the desegregation debate. Essentially, black students believed they were entitled to basic educational facilities—a building large enough to house the student population, a library, an auditorium, a gymnasium—and that they should be educated in school climates where their intellect could be appreciated and cultivated. The results also show that black students depended heavily on national organizations and that national organizations depended on black youth. These findings provide a stark contrast to the historical debates that center more on the implementation of *Brown* than on the roles these youth played in seeking a more equitable public school system.

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## Acknowledgements

Watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them—Deuteronomy 4:9

My mother, Kathy Landers, bought me a coloring book when I was in kindergarten so I could practice staying within the lines. While my other classmates had moved on to much more complex lessons, I was still trying to master the art of tracing and coloring. I remember vividly growing frustrated one evening as I attempted to master this mountainous task. My two older sisters, Kalisha and Teresa, were sitting at the table with and noticed my frustration. After encouraging me that I could learn to trace and color the shapes, they took turns showing me how they mastered each task. My memory of how the story plays out over the next days or years is murky but I do know that tracing and coloring never became a skill I mastered. I share this personal history because I know this dissertation was not written by me alone but by everyone who encouraged me throughout my life.

As a person I faith, I would like to acknowledge the Trinity—God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit—who guide and protect me. I am thankful for the opportunities God made available to me and for the ones shunned from me because in both cases my faith and trust increased. I thank God for giving me the ear to hear from people forgotten and an avenue to share their voices. Also, I am thankful for the courage instilled in me to speak out against any form of injustice and hatred.

I want to thank my wife, Dr. Carla J. Willis, for her love, loyalty, and support. Carla and I met in graduate school and she has been a mainstay throughout this process.

Even when she was in the throes of her comprehensive exams and writing her dissertation, she remained supportive. In addition to supporting my project, Carla constantly challenges me to be a better scholar, husband, and person. I do not take her love, loyalty, and support for granted.

I want to thank the matriarch of the Craft family, Margaret Craft. Margaret Craft is my great-grandmother and even though she passed from this earth over a decade ago, I still find myself holding on to words she told me directly or words she told my mother who passed them on to me. Her wisdom has surpassed her physical presence, and I am a much better scholar and individual because of her. My grandparents—Benjamin Craft Jr. and Louise Craft—and my parents—Darryl and Kathy Landers—have played an essential role in my life. I learned the meaning of selflessness from them. For decades, I witnessed my grandparents' and parents' give unconditionally with limited resources. They taught me that resources, rather plentiful or scarce, should not be horded but shared to benefit others. I have learned countless and invaluable lessons from my sisters, nieces, nephew, aunts, uncles, and cousins that are too long to list. To members of the Craft family, I would simply like to say thank-you.

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## Chapter 1

## The Dawn of a New Era: Federal Rulings, Social Movements, and Youth Activism

> Student power is not so much something we are fighting for, as it is something we must have . . . In short, what the student power movement is about is freedom.
> ─Carl Davidson, Students for a Democratic Society[1]

In 1970, Edward Sampson and Harold Korn wrote "The 1960s were a time of national turmoil and crisis. Forces released in the individual and in society gave rise to an outburst of mass discontent . . . Not since the Civil War had the system of government been so sorely tested."[2] The transformative components demarked the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s as a new era, specifically as it related to politics, economics, education, and racial customs. *Brown* vs. *Board of Education I* and *II*, decided in 1954 and 1955, addressed legal segregation in public schools. In the 1960s, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which addressed economic and political discrimination. Within the span of eleven years, customs that existed since the nation's founding were ruled unconstitutional, which proved pivotal to the progressive narrative that began to take shape during this period. An example widely used to illustrate the transformation taking place in the country, particularly the South, was the removal of legal segregation in public schools and universities.

Despite numerous examples of the educational inequality that occurred throughout the period, the prevailing narrative of America's educational history is that

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[1] Research Corporation Urban and Danowski Poetry Library (Emory University. General Libraries) Raymond, *Right on: a Documentary on Student Protest* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).
[2] Edward E. Sampson and Harold Allen Korn, *Student Activism and Protest* (Jossey-Bass, 1970), xii.

public education has constantly improved. Since the mid-twentieth century, education in America has been portrayed as being more inclusive, tolerant, and progressive.[3] Supposedly, *Brown I* and *Brown II* corrected the wrongdoings of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and placed America's educational system on a more progressive path. For black students, in particular, the years after *Brown* are elevated because of the access they then had to institutions once denied to them. In addition to access, there was a noticeable increase in funding for black schools and black students. While these results are accurate, they tell us very little about the educational experiences of the majority of black youth who attended public schools after *Brown*.

Shifting the lens to view the story through the eyes of black youth creates a different narrative. Events in Clinton, Tennessee, Little Rock, Arkansas, New Orleans, Louisiana, and other cities throughout the South, illuminate how black youth were subjected to constant mistreatment, forced to attend dilapidated schools, and faced strong opposition by whites who opposed integration. As *Brown* moved from a legal proceeding to one of practical implementation, white opposition increased in the South and created ruptures in the public perception of progression toward equality.[4] Throughout the South, turmoil and crisis existed in conjunction with federal rulings but the turmoil and crisis are often overlooked or consigned as isolated incidences, particularly when the conversation is about education.

---

[3]Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* (Times Books, 1998); David B Tyack, *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* (Harvard University Press, 1995); Joel H. Spring, *The American School: From the Puritans to No Child Left Behind* (McGraw-Hill, 2008).

[4] The seminal texts of Heather Williams, *Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 2; and James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1988), illustrate how educational inequalities are part of a historical continuum. Anderson stated, "From the end of Reconstruction until the late 1960s, black southerners existed in a social system that virtually denied them citizenship . . . Black education developed within this context of political and economic oppression."

The opposition black students experienced after the *Brown* ruling is often discussed as fringe events that decreased over time; however, a report by the Civil Rights Commission in 1969 notes that white opposition was persistent nearly two decades after *Brown*. A primary finding from the report was that "white students and teachers frequently harass and punish the black children whose parents have chosen to send their children to formerly white-attended schools."[5] Concurrent with their mistreatment in white schools, black students, in the aftermath of *Brown,* faced a number of educational injustices in black schools. These injustices included, but were not limited to, dilapidated facilities and secondhand textbooks. An examination of the period from the perspective of black youth suggests that these injustices were anything but fringe events.

Using *Brown* as the lynchpin, the purpose of this dissertation is to examine the cyclical relationship between the rhetoric of *Brown*, the educational realities of black youth, the ways students responded to those realities, and the responses students received from those who wanted the status quo to remain in place, post-*Brown*.[6] Education after *Brown* was supposed to be different because the ruling gave blacks, who had struggled for educational equality for centuries, a contract. This contract simply stated that black students were just as entitled to a good education as their white counterparts.[7] However,

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[5] *New York Times*, "Text of Civil Rights Commission Statement on School Desegregation," 28. The Civil Rights Commission was founded in 1957 under President Dwight D. Eisenhower to "relieve discontent." For more information on the Civil Rights Commission read Mary Frances Berry, *And Justice for All: The United States Commission on Civil Rights and the Continuing Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 3.

[6] The usage of the word rhetoric in relation to *Brown* does not imply that the case was a form of legal posturing. I argue the contrary. I agree with Clarke Rountree who asserts that rhetoric as it relates to *Brown* implies "an engine of change in human history." However the language used in the case was undergirded by compromises that inevitably influenced the educational experiences of black youth. For more information on rhetorical theory read, Clarke Rountree, ed., *Brown v. Board of Education at Fifty: A Rhetorical Perspective* (New York: Lexington Books, 2004).

[7] For information on the intent of *Brown* read Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974, 2004);

even though the law sided with blacks, it did very little to change the belief, held by a number of whites, that blacks should not have access to the same type of education afforded to whites or have access to their institutions. Rather than the contract being fulfilled, white opposition to *Brown* and the activism of black students created a farrago that greatly influenced southern education after the court's ruling.

Framed within the context of *Brown*, this study is guided by four research questions:

1) What ways did the rhetoric of *Brown* compare and contrast with the educational realities of black youth after the Supreme Court's ruling?

2) What effect did white opposition have on the educational realities of black students?

3) How did black youth respond to the educational inequities and white opposition they faced during the post-*Brown* era?

4) What was the relationship between Civil Rights and Black Power organizations and the activism of black youth?

The research centers the post-*Brown* decision educational experiences of black youth, their activism, and white opposition, in an effort to provide a more comprehensive understanding of black students' beliefs, agency, and advocacy. Moreover, it challenges the portrayal of black youth primarily as puppets and victims of white opposition.[8]

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Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[8] Read Melba Pattillo Beals, *Warriors Don't Cry; a Searing Memoir of the Battle to Integrate Little Rock's Central High* (New York: Pocket Books, 1994), xvii-xvii. In her memoir, Beals gave a great illustration of the agency she and the other eight black students had in a very hostile environment. Consciously using the word warrior, she used this term to portray the bravery they displayed while desegregating Central High School. Beals, stated, "At the age of fifteen, I faced angry mobs . . . threatening to kill us to keep us out, and armed soldiers of the Arkansas National Guard dispatched by the governor to block our entry." The Little Rock Nine is probably the most well known desegregation story in the country, rarely are these nine black students or other black students that desegregated all white schools referred to as activists or warriors. For more information on black students who desegregated white schools read Margaret Anderson, *The Children of the South* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1958).

According to Woodhouse, "Countless children were active participants in the movement, and generally they marched, sang, and shed their blood in anonymity."[9] Although recent scholarship has begun to examine how black children participated in the fight for equality, the historiography of American education is still missing an in-depth study on the ways in which black youth participated in the struggle for educational equality and how they faced constant opposition by those who benefited from the status quo.[10]

## Significance and Early Examination

The opposition to black student activism is not limited to the fight to enter white schools. Nearly twenty years after the passage of *Brown*, school boards often refused to fund black schools equally to whites. Whether in black or white schools, black youth participated in a scurrilous fight that, as Thurgood Marshall inadvertently predicted, heightened when the country decided to pay its long overdue commitment to providing equal education. Therefore, this work is significant because it centers in the historical narrative the experiences and activism of black youth who were mostly affected by the reform policies of the 1950s and 1960s. By centering black youth, we gain an expanded sense of critical issues in school reform that have escaped elevation in either school reform literature or historical accounts. For instance, an early examination of black students' educational experiences and their activism illuminates that the students' protest was not with *Brown* but with local leaders who failed to accept and implement the law. This cyclical relationship, created by whites' response to *Brown*, demonstrates that the

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[9] Barbara Bennett Woodhouse, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Tragedy of Children's Rights from Ben Franklin to Lionel Tate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 135.
[10] For recent works that illustrate some form of black student activism, read Rebecca De Schweinitz, *If They Could Change the World*: *Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Tracy Sugarman, *We had Sneakers, They had Guns: The Kids Who Fought for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009); Robert H. Mayer, *When the Children Marched: The Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2008).

duality of two elements—white opposition and black student activism—was continually present.

Utilizing archival records from across the South, an initial inquiry revealed that opposition and activism in the wake of *Brown*, were not abnormalities. For example, an article published in the *New York Times* documents how hostility and activism often occupied the same space. According to the *New York Times*, "287 Negroes walked out of classes over alleged harassment by whites and school officials." The suspension of these students caused other black students to protest on their behalf. The article continued to say, "Sixteen Negroes, mostly teenagers, were arrested today when they attempted to march on two newly integrated schools to protest alleged harassment of Negro students."[11] The story illustrates how the South was able to make some educational gains by allowing black students to enroll in white schools while simultaneously maintaining the status quo in its resistance to their presence.

Also, this dissertation has significance for those concerned with contemporary issues. Dana Mitra wrote in *Student Voice in School Reform* as "the current focus on closing the achievement gap and improving student achievement grows, the voices of the individual actors have become more subdued . . . . student [‘s] role in reform . . . little has changed in the past twenty years."[12] Mitra went on to state that "student government was created to provide students with an opportunity to practice the duties and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy, but school administrators rarely afford students to grapple

[11] *New York Times,* "Grenada, Miss. Jails 16 More Negroes in School Protest," pg. 27, October 28, 1966; ProQuest Historical Newspaper. Retrieved January 5, 2010.
[12] Dana L. Mitra, *Student Voice in School Reform: Building Youth-Adult Partnerships That Strengthen Schools and Empower Youth* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008), 9.

with core issues."[13] Recounting how the activism of black students challenged and forced reform in the aftermath of *Brown* illuminates how students' participation in reform can be useful in grappling with present day issues.

Indeed, this study challenges us to compare contemporary educational issues with issues that existed decades ago. Oftentimes, educational historians pick a time period and a topic they would like to explore and write about it with no attention given to the present. The same can be said for contemporary scholars who grapple with educational issues, such as the achievement gap or the disproportionate funding that takes place among black, brown, and white students but fail to consider any historical context. The former writes only about what happened while the latter discusses only what is currently happening. Both scholars are bound by disciplinary integrity, which may explain the refusal of both to consider how current educational issues are off springs of historical educational issues. Nonetheless, a close look at the past and the present reveals obvious parallels.

For instance, February 17, 2009, precisely 44 years and 14 days after the Moultrie, Georgia students' protest discussed in Chapter 5, a report by *Al Jazeera*, reported on black students in Baltimore, Maryland protesting against educational inequalities. The report began with an African American male chanting, "We don't want your pity; we want funding for our city." The students protested the funding disparities between the Baltimore school system and the nearby Fairfax County school system, a system populated predominantly by white students. One African American female student stated, "Last year it was hard for us to get toilet paper and soap in the bathroom.

[13] Ibid, 8.

We would get it at the beginning of the week, but like Wednesday, no more for you."[14] The primary reason for the students' protest stemmed from funding inequities that existed not only in Baltimore's educational system but throughout the United States.

The correlation between the inequality and the black student responses in two settings, although separated by 44 years, suggest that black students protesting educational injustices is not a new phenomenon. The significance of these parallel examples is that they bridge the educational problems black students' face today with the historical issues of the past. In fact, I argue that current educational inequities cannot be discussed without examining how students arrived at the current juncture. This context may be useful in explaining why black youth respond as they do to contemporary inequities. [15]

## Contextualizing Terms, Movements, and Events

The benefit of studying history is that it constantly reiterates how terms, movements, and events are transient. Terms are constantly changing while movements and events are constantly being reinterpreted. Moreover, in academic circles, terms are frequently being debated, movements are constantly being challenged, and historical events are frequently called into question. However, the one idea that historians will agree on is that historical studies must be contextualized. Therefore, I will briefly discuss the historical concepts of childhood, the scholarly portrait of the Civil Rights and Black Power era, and the impact of the *Brown* decision as a way to frame the events in my study. It is important to discuss

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[14] *Al Jazeera,* "US Students Fight for Education Rights," February19, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGElD9srKmU. Accessed March 18, 2009. For more information about the racial inequities in the Baltimore county school system, read Jacob Rosette, "A School Board for the People: Baltimore Freedom Fall." *Race, Poverty, and the Environment* (2007) 23-24.

[15] Shawn A. Ginwright, *Black Youth Rising: Activism and Radical Healing in Urban America* (Teachers College Press, 2009).

the shifting definition of childhood, social movements occurring during this time and historic events, like *Brown,* because black students were greatly influenced by all of these ideas. First, I will examine how the ideas of childhood have shifted in America and how the shifts gave way to children's agency. Secondly, I will discuss briefly how the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements created a climate of activism. Finally, I will explain how the *Brown* decision centralized the educational experiences of black students and why I decided to begin my study in 1954.

## The Fluidity of Childhood in America

Multiple disciplines have contributed to our thinking about children and their developmental stages.[16] Ideals regarding childhood and the stages of childhood are fluid constructs that have changed over time, just as the constructs of race, gender, and class have changed throughout history. In *Childhood and History in America*, Glenn Davis stated, "Childhood in the past has had a variety of meanings. Some historians have viewed the childhood years as a noncausal microcosm of later adult society. Others have attributed to childhood some vague elements of the foundations of adult culture."[17] Davis included the psychohistory of childhood. However, I wish to draw attention to the ways he illustrated the fluidity of childhood and how discussions take place across various disciplines.

Since America's inception, the concepts of adulthood and childhood have always been fluid. The level in which adults and children were distinguished varies depending on

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[16]See Glenn Davis, *Childhood and History in America*. (New York: The Psychohistory Press, 1976); *Yvette* R. Harris and James A. Graham, *The African American Child: Developments and Challenges* (New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2007); Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American* Childhood (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Pres of Harvard University, 2004); Edward F. Zigler and Nancy W. Hall, *Child Development and the Social Policy: Theory and Applications* (Boston: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2000).

[17]Davis, *Childhood and History in America*, 13.

time and place. In *Youth Tell Their Story* Howard M. Bell pointed out the complexity of defining childhood in America from a historical point of view. He stated, "The essential character of this younger generation of Americans has been so variously interpreted by adults . . . In this babel of confusing and contradictory voices, one might well wonder where to look for the truth. . . The American Youth Commission of the American Council on Education has gone directly to youth—and given them a chance to reveal the conditions under which they are living."[18] It is very true that giving a concrete definition of what childhood is or is not is nearly impossible. However, the work of the American Youth Commission showed that children were aware of the world in which they lived, and they had thoughts on how to improve it. The existence of a study that gave children a platform to articulate their thoughts on family, schooling, and fun activities portrays how the concepts of childhood shifted in the twentieth century. Steven Mintz stated, "Scientific understanding of children's emotional, physical, and sexual development increased markedly at the end of the nineteenth century."[19] Therefore, the shift in childhood ideologies at the end of the nineteenth century gave way to the study performed by the American Council on Education.

Mintz's work discussed the fluidity of childhood in America and the diversity of childhood. This focus on diversity is quite different than Bell's focus in that he investigates the structural issues in greater detail.[20]

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[18] Howard M. Bell, *Youth tell their Story: A Study of the Conditions and Attitudes of Young People in Maryland between Ages of 16 and 24* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1938), 1.

[19] Steven Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 186. The two developments that Mintz speaks of are that of childbearing and the adolescence stage.

[20]In fairness to the American Youth Commission, the study did include the voices from different groups (i.e. "Negroes," females, and those from different faiths) but the systematic issues were not interrogated, 122.

> Childhood, the period from infancy to eighteen, includes girls and boys at very different stages of development. It encompasses a wide variety of classes, ethnic groups, regions, and time periods. During the seventeenth century demographic, economic, ideological, and religious factors bined [*sic*] to make geographical subcultures the most significant makers of childhood diversity. By the mid-nineteenth century, shifts in cultural and religious values and a highly uneven process of economic development made social class, gender, and race more salient sources of childhood diversity.[21]

Mintz's notion that childhood is indeterminate and diverse is not a new concept. Several scholars have written about childhood in a way that illustrates how childhood has changed over time.[22] All of these scholars agree, for the most part, that childhood in America is continuously being challenged and shifting. However, the benefit of Mintz's work is that he separated the shifting construct of childhood in three overlapping periods. According to Mintz, the three overlapping shifts that have occurred in America are colonial, modern, and postmodern. Although this study only examines children during the postmodern era, Mintz argued that children were active agents during all these eras.

Another focus of Mintz's work was the active agency displayed by children in the "evolutions of their society." Other scholars, such as Barbara Woodhouse and Rebecca De Schweinitz, add to Mintz's work by reframing the way in which children's agency and voices are exhibited. Woodhouse challenges the idea of America's love for children as somewhat of a fallacy. She stated, "children of color who were enslaved and then later faced racism; children with disabilities; girls facing sexism and sexual exploitation; and

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[21]Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, ix. I will be using Mintz's definition of childhood. So, when I use youth, I am referring to students who were five to eighteen years of age during the time period in which I am studying.
[22]Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Knopf, 1962); Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-child Relations from 1500-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1983); Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in the Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

boys and girls who were as children physically, emotionally, and sexually abused" are indictments on America and a call for America to extend human rights to children.[23] Although Woodhouse mostly focused on the spreading of children's rights, she—simultaneously—discussed how childhood shifted and the agency that children displayed throughout history. For instance, she discussed the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrates how children were not just acted upon but they acted as well. Children as active agents can be seen throughout her work, which is valuable because she—like the study done by the American Youth Commission—depicts the importance of children's voices and how their voices increased throughout history.

By the 1950s, the climate of America changed dramatically in that people were beginning to pay closer attention to children and the influence society had on them. Given what was known about childhood in the 1950s and 1960s, black children became the gauge for racial progress.[24] Whether it was Dr. King speaking about the chances of his children being victims of racial violence or the NAACP lawyers arguing how detrimental segregation was to the black child, the common theme throughout this period was that black children should not have to grow up in a racist society. All of these factors shifted the ways adults—especially African Americans—viewed black children.

[23] Barbara Bennett Woodhouse, *Hidden in Plain Sight: The Tragedy of Children's Rights from Ben Franklin to Lionel Tate* (Princeton University Press, 2008), xiii; Rebecca De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World: Young People and America's Long Struggle for Racial Equality* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[24] De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World*.

**Activism Ignited by Social Movements**

How can the Civil Rights Movement be defined? Is the Civil Rights Movement different from the Black Power Movement or is it part of one struggle? What were the events that occurred during these movements that may have ignited the imagination of black youth?[25] Many more questions arise than answers when attempting to answer any of these questions. Sundiata Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang suggested in "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire,' that most of the scholarship on the 'Long Movement' falls into "four interrelated categories." The categories are locality, reperiodization, continuity, and how the South was not distinct from other parts of the country. The authors went on to critique the scholarship on the Long Movement by "question[ing] the adequacy of the Long Movement thesis because it collapses periodization schemas, erases conceptual differences between waves of the BLM [Black Liberation Movement], and blurs regional distinctions in the African American experience."[26] Cha-Jua and Lang's primary point is that these categories are too dichotomous and scholars need to go beyond these axioms to better define the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements and explain the similarities and differences of the Movements.

Although Cha-Jua and Lang's call for a more sophisticated examination of social movements is useful, the scholarship that illuminates how the Civil Rights Movement

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[25] See Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, 91, (March: 2005); Hasan Jeffries*, Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009); *Jeffrey* O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and American Identity* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2004); Henry Hampton and Steve Fayer, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s* (New York: Bantam Books, 1990); Kevern Verney, *The Debate on Black Civil Rights in America* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006); Verney stated, "The historiographical debate on black civil rights is as vain as the hope of discovering the mythical pot of gold at the end of a rainbow . . . Their role is not to uncover any final truth, but rather to play a part in an unceasing search for a fuller and more detailed understanding of the past" 167.

[26] Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Long, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *Journal of African American History*, 92 (Spring 2007): 265-288.

was "the struggle against white supremacy," as Charles Payne labels racial segregation, and "featured a host of angry activists, well-meaning white liberals, and determined defenders of the old ways," provides more context for this study.[27] The scholarship that predates the 1950s is essential to this study because it illustrates how events influenced the Movement. For example, Lawson and Payne suggested that the Civil Rights Movement began in the 1940s during President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. They stated, "African Americans pressured the president to live up to his democratic pronouncements of preserving freedom . . . He issued an executive order creating the Fair Employment Practice Committee (FEPC) to investigate job discrimination in federal employment and in industries performing federal work."[28]

Patricia Sullivan suggests that "World War II gave a new urgency to black protest and further stimulated white resistance to black demands for equal citizenship rights . . . Significant segments of the black community experienced a new sense of empowerment, which would be sustained in the face of increasing white resistance by courtroom victories, culminating with the *Brown* decision in 1954."[29] The works illuminate that white opposition did not begin with the passing of *Brown* but continued from the previous decade.

Essentially, Black Power was a movement birthed from white opposition and racist practice as well.[30] Even though both Movements were in response to a hostile

[27] Steven F. Lawson and Charles Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1968* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 1.
[28] Lawson and Payne, *Debating the Civil Rights Movement,* 5.
[29] Patricia Sullivan, "Southern Reformers, the New Deal and the Movement's Foundation," in *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies*, 85-87, 99. Also see, Jack Dougherty, "That's When We were Marching for Jobs": Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee," *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 38, (Summer, 1998), 121-141.
[30] Although the infamous "March Against Fear" is the event that is credited for igniting the Black Power Movement, fragments of the movement's philosophical ideology dates as far back to the early part of the

system, Black Power was a drastic ideological shift from the Civil Rights Movement.[31] At its core, the movement was a rejection of racial practices that black people had experienced since slavery. As Jeffrey Ogbar stated, "Black Power affected African American identity and politics . . . Two fundamental themes, however, were widely celebrated among proponents: black pride and self-determination."[32] By the mid to late 60s, self reliance and self defense through armed resistance became an acceptable method for a number of black people. Carmichael, in a speech given at the "March Against Fear," said he believed self-defense and black empowerment was the only way for blacks to gain true power. He stated,

> Black Power is one of the most legitimate and healthy developments in American politics and race relations in our time . . . It is a call for black people in this country to unite to recognize their heritage, to build a sense of community. It is a call for black people to begin to define their own goals, to lead their own organizations and to support those organizations. It is a call to reject the racist institutions and values of this society.[33]

Furthermore, Carmichael proposed that Black Power resonated more with black youth because they had witnessed the constant failures of gradualism. Other scholars have reiterated the appeal black power had on a large number of African Americans, particularly the young, because a number of young people believed the methods and goals—integration and non-violence—of the Civil Rights Movement were "irrelevant."[34]

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twentieth century with Marcus Garvey and the creation of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

[31] To understand how the philosophical shift of the Black Power Movement influenced the educational demands from the black community, specifically in Chicago, read Dionne Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organizing in Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[32] Ogbar, *Black Power,* 2
[33] For more information on the "March Against Fear" read David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004); Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power,* 45.
[34] For more information on the Black Power Movement read Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Random House, 1967); Peniel Joseph,

Inasmuch as we can see stark differences between the movements, focusing solely on the differences can cause one to miss the primary purpose of the movements, which was freedom. The struggle for freedom was not linear, static, or monolithic, which is another point made by Cha-Jua and Lang. The struggle for freedom had to be adaptive, evolve, and refurbished to address issues germane to a particular time, event, and location. For example, Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan's edited volume stated, "We view the civil rights movement as a transformative event, one which constantly created and recreated itself."[35] The same could be said for the Black Power Movement. Therefore, both movements rejected racism and forced America to redefine what freedom meant and who was entitled to it. Although scholars continue to debate the origin and differences within the movements, both created a heightened climate of protest that impacted black youth directly and indirectly.

No Ordinary Case: Events that Impacted Black Youth

Prior to the 1960s, African Americans relied heavily on court litigations to obtain equality. For instance, *Sarah's Long Walk* by Stephen Kendrick and Paul Kendrick depicts how *Roberts vs. the City of Boston* was one of the earliest cases where blacks used the court system to fight against educational inequality. Memories of the *Roberts* case, however, are largely erased by *Brown* as the most known case that blacks used to gain access to education.

Because it was the case that overturned legal segregation in public schools, *Brown* is an appropriate place to begin describing black youth educational activism for several

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*Waiting 'til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2006).

[35] Armstead L. Robinson and Patricia Sullivan eds., *New Directions in Civil Rights Studies* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 6.

reasons. First, the coverage of black youth in news mediums increased around this time because of the news worthy events taking place. A year after the *Brown* decision, Emmett Till became a well-known name. He was only fourteen years old when he was brutally killed in Mississippi for "flirting" with a white girl.[36] According to Bruce Direnfield, the killing of Emmett Till "expose[d] the evil of lynching and spur[ed] the nascent civil rights movement."[37] This tragic event created not only frustration and concern within the black community but an atmosphere of activism as well. According to Wilma King, "Till's death ignited the inspiration for many black children of his generation to fight the discrimination surrounding them in the 1960s . . . As a result, an organizational structure [Civil Rights Movement] was already in place that could channel the activities of boys and girls who were sensitized by Till's death."[38] Individuals and organizations realized that participation in the struggle for equality was the only option because if an innocent child could be killed for a gesture, then any black person could, whether man, woman, or child.

Wilma King also addressed the core concern black parents had for their children, which was their children's physical and mental safety during this period. Even Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. discussed the concern he had over the possibility of his children being a victim of some atrocious crime and not being sure of his reaction. The concern that black parents felt for their children's safety was also shared by the children growing up in the South. Black children realized that the murder of Emmett Till was not just an isolated incident committed by a few white men but a bigger societal issue that allowed such

[36] Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (New York: The Free Press, 1988).
[37] Bruce Direnfield. ed., The Civil Rights Movement (Harlow, England: Person Education Limited, 2004), 28.
[38] Wilma King, *African American Childhoods*, 164-165.

atrocities to go unpunished. King, stated, "The linkages between Till's death and emerging activism by younger blacks were clear." [39] This correlation is also evident in the bombing that took place in Birmingham.

In 1963, four young black girls—Carol Denise McNair, Cynthia Diane Wesley, Carole Rosamond Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins—were killed in a bombing at the 16th Street Baptist Church. King recalls a statement by John Lewis in which he stated "The bombing murders was a 'very, very dark moment for the civil rights movement,' but it galvanized the movement and caused civil rights advocates to intensify their efforts."[40] Consequently, the horrendous acts experienced by black youth helped accelerate a movement that changed the course of American history.

The second reason to use 1954 as a starting-point of this study is because the time period is consistent with a general acknowledgment of a shift in the gradual approaches that had been a mainstay for decades. According to Sheldon Berman, scholars have focused on youth's understanding of their social and political reality since World War II. [41] Some scholars have shown how the ideals of the Black Power Movement began to appeal to a larger segment of the black community, mostly young people. [42] Yet, they fail to address how youth involvement in the struggle for equality was different than previous generations.

King suggested in her work that young people of the 1950s and 1960s were not convinced that their parents' approach to racial injustices was the most effective method.

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[39] ibid.
[40] Ibid, 167.
[41] Read Sheldon Berman, *Children's Social Consciousness and the Development of Responsibility* (New York: The State of New York University Press, 1997).
[42] See the works of Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize; the United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour*; Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement; Rethinking the Civil Rights—Black Power Era* (New York: Routhledge, 2006); Ogbar, *Black Power*.

She implies that young people growing up during this time period felt the passive/non-violent approach needed to be revamped. Even though the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) started off as an organization that, for the most part, adhered to the non-violent principles of the Civil Rights Movement, by the mid-1960s the organization was more confrontational. Jeffrey Ogbar's discussion of SNCC appears to agree with King. He stated, "SNCC members were long known as the most militant figures in the movement. The young and zealous activists confronted white supremacy head on with a tough and forceful dedication and commitment to social change."[43] Although SNCC, in relation to education, is discussed in greater detail in the literature review, the organization is important to include here because of its student leadership, thus providing a context for student activism post-*Brown*.

Even though my study focuses on the educational experiences and activism of black youth, providing a broader organizational and civil rights context allows for a better understanding. Neither their experiences nor their advocacy can be isolated from the hostile world in which they lived. In addition, youth advocacy cannot be separated from organizations that influenced their participation in the struggle for racial equality. Throughout the study, I acknowledge the overlap and dissonance in the use of terminology post-*Brown* and Civil Rights/Black Power Era. When discussing the specific beliefs and activism of black students, I will use the term post-*Brown*. In contrast, when discussing organizational activity and its relationship to student activity, I refer to the Civil Rights or Black Era, depending on the organization and strategies being used. The post-*Brown* time period to which I refer in this study includes the years from 1954-1972.

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[43] Ogbar, *Black Power,* 57.

## Review of the Literature[44]

Scholars in different time periods have discussed student protest in very different ways. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, several books were published on student activism and student protest. For example, Anthony Orum found that community forces were the major structural determinants of the outbreak of student protest. He goes on to infer that black student protest at the beginning was parochial, but by the mid-sixties black student protest was no longer parochial.[45] Although I have benefited greatly from earlier works, they will not be used in this review because they tend to discuss college students and college organizations. When high school students are discussed, the focus is primarily on the social context or the characteristics of the youth, such as their educational level or their socio economic status. Even though these details are important, my study is primarily concerned with the activism of black youth, the foci of their advocacy, and the opposition they faced. This review will also discuss the social contexts but only in relationship to my subject matter.

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[44] My study is comprised of four primary disciplines—history, education, African American Studies, and sociology. Therefore, I conducted searches using Emory University's EUCLID Library Catalogue, JSTOR, Black Studies Center (consisting of journals, newspapers, and dissertations), EBSCO, and Proquest that allowed me to determine the amount of literature available to my research areas: Civil Rights/Black Power Movement—20th century—African Americans—Southern region, history of black education— *Brown vs. Board of Education,* black schools—school structure—segregation—integration, Civil Rights Movement and integration, Black Power Movement and education, childhood and the Post-*Brown* era, black children—Civil Rights/Black Power era—advocacy, black children and advocacy. Each time I found a book or an article that was relevant to my study; I examined the author's bibliographies, footnotes, and endnotes to see if I overlooked any work that could be beneficial to my study. Even though my literature review is primarily centered in 1954-1972, there are instances in which I will use work that predates my time period in order to provide context. There are also instances that I will discuss works that are not in my time period that provide examples of black children advocating for equal education or having the desire to but being held back by administrators. However, the majority of the works discussed in this review were written after the *Brown* decision.

[45] Anthony Orum, *Black Students in Protest: A Study of the Origins of the Black Student Movement* (Washington: American Sociological Association, 1972) For more information on student protest also read, Sampson and Korn, *Student Activism and Protest*; Levine and Naisitt, *Right On*.

I have divided this review of the literature into four sections—*Rhetoric/Reality of Brown, White Opposition to Equal Education*, *Black Youth Respond* and *Black Youth and Organizations*—in a way that illustrates the cyclical nature of the period while simultaneously examining how scholars have succeeded and failed to connect the expressions of *Brown* with black youth educational experiences, coupled with the opposition of whites and black student activism, and the role of Civil Rights/Black Power organizations. Thus, the purpose of this review is to gain a fuller understanding of the educational climate after the ruling and to see how those factors were interconnected.

Rhetoric/Reality of *Brown*

Prior to the 1950s, very few people could have predicted the decade would change the educational trajectory of America. Jim Crow was alive and vibrant in the South as if *Plessy* had just passed. Black students remained subjugated to second class education, while a number of their parents fared no better in the economic or political sector. Although blacks made some advances politically, legally, economically, and socially in the 1940s, the South still remained very segregated.[46] However, brewing in the courtrooms in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a challenge to the South's status quo. In several different cases throughout the South, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) lawyers decided to attack *Plessy* head on.

[46] Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishing, INC., 2010); Carol Anderson, *Eyes Off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

This case would, at least legally, grant blacks full access to public institutions they had been denied for centuries.[47]

Researchers have shown how *Brown* and desegregation were supposed to transform an educational system that was full of injustices into a more equitable system.[48] Prior to the *Brown* ruling, white southerners cloaked their racist beliefs under the guile of being law abiding citizens. However, after the legal barrier to desegregation was struck down in the courts, social barriers remained. Very few understood how staunchly opposed white southerners were to desegregation. Henry Bullock addressed the social resistance. A little over a decade after the Courts' ruling, Bullock talked about how desegregation would be slow and some wondered if it would come at all. In, *A History of Negro Education in the South,* he wrote,

> Negro Americans had spent approximately thirty years in a campaign of sustained court litigation, seeking to secure school desegregation and equal protection of their constitutional rights. Accepting the United States Constitution seriously, they had utilized established institutional channels in pursuit of relief. The relief had come much more in words than in deeds.[49]

Bullock's work is confirmed by contemporary scholars, such as Gary Orfield and Derrick Bell, both of whom illuminate how the rhetoric of *Brown* differed greatly from the educational realities experienced by the majority of black children. Gary Orfield

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[47] Richard Kluger. *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974, 2004); Mark Tushnet. *The NAACP's Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925-1950*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1987).

[48] Read Dara N. Bryne, ed. *Brown v. Board of Education: Its Impact on Public Education 1954-2004*. (New York: Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund, 2005); Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Vanessa Siddle Walker, "Second-Class Integration: A Historical Perspective for a Contemporary Agenda" *Harvard Education Review*, Vol. 79:2, (Summer 2009), 269-284.

[49] Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 265, 279-280.

documented that an overwhelming majority of black children did not experience desegregation.

According to Orfield, only one in one-hundred-thousand black students attended majority white schools in 1954 and nearly a decade later, only one in one-hundred were attending white schools. Moreover, the author shows that the *Brown* decision did not offer any immediate relief from the educational inequalities for black children, parents, teachers, and administrators. He stated, "The [statistics] show that these states managed to largely defy the Supreme Court for a decade after *Brown*."[50] Therefore, black students were still going to all black schools, being taught by black teachers, had black principals, and still suffered, for the most part, from limited and unequal resources when compared to white schools. The fact that southern states refused to implement *Brown* was in accordance with their history rather than a departure from it.

Derrick Bell captured how most white southerners never intended for *Brown* to be a ruling that would be practiced. In fact, Bell, unlike Orfield, Bullock, and others, suggested that the decision was used to help maintain the status quo. According to Bell,

> The decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and its unassertative and finally failed implementation were in tune with, rather than a departure from, this history. It was a perfect precedent precisely because it spoke in reformist tones that lifted the spirits of blacks and raised the ire of whites whose leaders' overreaction to civil rights protest led to public support and congressional action that might not otherwise have occurred for some time. At bottom, though, *Brown* helped maintain a stable society by moving it forward, far less than civil rights advocates had hoped but far more than opponents felt was needed or necessary.[51]

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[50] Gary Orfield, "Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation. *The Civil Rights Project: Harvard University* (July, 2001), 29-30.
[51] Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 198.

The above quote by Bell is indicative of how what was stated varied from what was practiced. On the one hand, education during this period was expected to rectify the educational inequalities created by centuries of racial practices and legal reinforcement. On the other hand, educational leaders aimed to continue the status quo of a stratified system where whites would still control the resources and decide how educational resources would be allocated throughout the public school system.

For the most part, scholars have supported their claims that the rhetoric of *Brown* did not align with the educational realities of black children by illustrating how few black children actually attended white schools. However, the lack of equal allocation of resources is another example that depicts the difference of what was said versus what was implemented. The educational disparities that had plagued black children for decades were still prevalent during this time period, 1960-1972.[52] Rebecca de Schweinitz argued that, although educational gains were made by blacks in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a number of black students still felt inequalities persisted daily. She stated, "Young people expressed dissatisfaction with better but nevertheless inadequate and inferior schools and educational programs. In interviews conducted in 1959 and 1960, southern black college students noted that educational facilities and opportunities had improved but complained about poorly equipped high schools . . . The schools were crowded and in disrepair."[53] Consequently, a number of black students, attending public schools during the 60s and early 70s, encountered educational injustices as they matriculated through school. The way black students were treated in public schools reflected the inequities that persisted.

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[52] For more information on the educational disparities blacks endured from slavery up until World War II and their responses to those injustices, read Williams, *Self Taught,* 2005; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South,* 1988.
[53] de Schweinitz, *If They Could Change the World*, 231-232.

In essence, the ruling of *Brown* challenged the legal portion of *Plessy* but allowed the social aspect of *Plessy* to continue, which inevitably affected the educational experiences of black children.

**White Opposition to Equal Education**

In *Lost Revolutions*, Pete Daniel stated, "The *Brown v. Board of Education* decision fatally divided society and provoked whites to make a frantic defense of segregation . . . Southern whites twisted the law to portray themselves as victims and begrudged every black advance."[54] Similar to Sampson and Korn's work, discussed in the introduction, Daniel portrayed how whites did not take kindly to the passage of *Brown* and examines the ways in which they actively fought against educational equality. Although Daniel's work is situated in the 1950s, when read in conjunction with other scholarly works of the 1960s and 1970s, it confirms that a number of whites, throughout the South, opposed any form of desegregation and equal funding for black schools. One of the strongest opponents to *Brown* was the White Citizens' Council. According to Clive Webb, "The Councils attained a membership estimated at 250,000 . . . recruited from the middle class. They tried to appeal to issues of high political principal by framing their opposition to the Supreme Court decision within the strict doctrine of states' rights."[55] Whites illustrated their opposition to educational equality primarily through verbal and physical abuse and closing of public schools.

Although the story for black's struggle for educational equality is frequently told in a way that glosses over the constant opposition they faced, it is important that

[54] Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 2.
[55] Clive Webb, ed., *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

researchers chronicle this essential part of the narrative because white opposition oftentimes led to some of the physical and psychological damage black youth faced and stunted their educational opportunity. Works that study white's opposition to desegregation explain how unified some whites were in continuing the era of Jim Crow. Webb recalls that, "the Southern Manifesto acted as a clarion call to the forces of white resistance. Defiance of the Supreme Court decision became the litmus test of white southerners' racial and regional loyalties . . . 'the white South is as united as 30,000,000 people can be in its insistence upon segregation.'" Michael Klarman suggests the survival of white resistance rested on "die hard states exert[ing] pressure on more moderately inclined neighbors to support massive resistance." While understanding the complexity of white resistance is important for historical accuracy, it is also essential because of the profound impact resistance had on the educational experiences of black children. The educational sector is one area in which black children were always faced with some form of resistance. For example, black children who desegregated white schools were constantly treated in hostile ways by white parents, white administrators, and white students.[56]

One of the first books to illustrate the mistreatment of black children upon entering an all white school was Margaret Anderson's *The Children of the South*. Anderson taught at Clinton High School, which is located in Clinton, Tennessee. She recalls black students being welcomed by the white students initially, but over the weekend a white man named John Kasper eventually convinced the white citizens of

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[56]ibid, 5; Michael J. Klarman. "Why Massive Resistance?" in *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction*, edited by Clive Webb (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 23. To see the effect resistance had on black children read Elizabeth Jacoway, "Not Anger but Sorrow: Minnijean Brown Trickey Remembers the Little Rock Crisis," 2005.

Clinton to oppose desegregation. Anderson states, "The Negro boys and girls had suffered such persecution and humiliation at the hands of the few white antagonists who seemed uncontrollable that they decided not to return to school until they could be guaranteed protection from bodily harm."[57] Even though the hostility of whites in Clinton eventually dwindled and black students continued to attend Clinton High, the precedent was set into motion and white resistance became more prevalent and white's resistance to black children entering their schools became the norm.

A year after Clinton High School desegregated, another southern city, Little Rock, Arkansas attempted the same feat. However, as documented in scholarly works, movies, mini-series, and memoirs, white resistance towards the nine black students lasted much longer and the ramification was more relentless than in Clinton. The students who entered Central High School, known as the Little Rock Nine, had to deal with hostile white citizens and with a governor who was determined to keep them from entering Central High School. The events that took place in Little Rock illuminate how persistent some whites were in preventing any form of desegregation from occurring. Both *Crisis at Central High* by Elizabeth Huckaby and the *Ernest Green Story* by Lawrence Roman captured the vile treatment and ongoing hostility the nine black students received from white students and their parents. Elizabeth Eckford, the mother of one of the Little Rock Nine, thought she heard Governor Orval Faubus saying that if the students attempted to

[57] Anderson. *The Children of the South,* 17. For more information on the events that took place in Clinton, TN read *New York Amsterdam News*, "Mass Youth Rally May 26 to Honor 'Freedom Fighters'," col. 1, pg. 2. May 25, 1957. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed February 12, 2010; *Atlanta Daily World*, "Negro Students are Admitted to Classes at Tennessee School," col. 5, pg. 1. August 28, 1956. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed February 12, 2010.

integrate Central High School, then “blood would run in the streets.”[58] This type of hostility did not occur periodically for black children; it was constant.

In *Turn Away Thy Son,* Elizabeth Jacoway gives a palpable illustration of what the nine black students went through when they attempted to enter Central High School. According to Jacoway, when Elizabeth Eckford approached the school, she heard a man say, “Here she comes, now get ready! . . . Whites where crowding close behind her saying things like, ‘Go back where you came from!’ Go home before you get hurt, nigger. Why don’t you go back to the god-damn jungle! Lynch her!”[59] The work of Jacoway is very useful because she shows vividly how attempting to obtain education for black youth during desegregation generated white hostility. Simultaneously, she depicts black students refusing to be denied what they considered to be their right.

Melba Beals’ memoir, *Warriors Don’t Cry*, recalls why she put up with the constant hostility and never accepted that she did not belong at Central High. She stated, “Black folks aren’t born expecting segregation, prepared from day one to follow its confining rules. Nobody presents you with a handbook when you’re teething and says, ‘here’s how you must behave as a second-class citizen."[60] Accounts suggest that racial ideology of blacks being inferior to whites and, therefore, not deserving of the same rights and privileges was never accepted by the black students who were attempting to integrate Central High School. Prior to Governor Faubus’ court hearing, the nine black students were interviewed by several reporters. One of the reporters asked¸ “Miss Pattillo, how do you feel about going back to Central High? Pattilo paused for several

[58] Elizabeth Jacoway, *Turn Away thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked the Nation* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 3.
[59] Ibid, 3-12.
[60] Beals, *Warriors don’t Cry,* 6.

minutes before she answered because she reports that she was very nervous. She then responded to the reporter's question by simply stating, 'We have a right to go to that school, and I'm certain our governor, who was elected to govern all the people, will decide to do what is just."[61] Beals' memoir reveals that the nine black students eventually attended Central High, but the hostility continued. For example, Minnijean Brown was suspended for dumping a bowl of chili on two white students. [62] Brown sums up the hostility that black children faced regularly by stating her perception of the beliefs of white students. "You have to be perfect to come to our imperfect school . . . we'll do everything we can to make sure that you can't measure up and we'll do that so well, you'll think it's your own fault."[63]

Vitriol was not the only way whites chose to exemplify their displeasure with *Brown*. Besides harassing black students who attempted to desegregate white schools and underfunding black schools, several southern states decided to close their public schools entirely. Although the Little Rock Nine are celebrated for desegregating Central High, most of the nine students did not graduate from the school because Governor Faubus decided to close the schools rather than desegregate. Similar events took place throughout the South in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Robert Smith's seminal text, *They Closed Their School,* revisits the closing of Moton High School in Prince Edward County, Virginia. He discussed how schools in Prince Edward County were closed for four years due to whites' refusal to desegregate. Arkansas and Virginia were not outliers. In fact they aligned themselves with other southern states like Mississippi and Georgia. According to Klarman, "Voters in Georgia and Mississippi passed constitutional

[61] ibid, 89.
[62] Jacoway, "Not Anger but Sorrow."
[63] *NPR,* Revisiting the Little Rock Chili Incident" December 17, *2007*.

amendments that authorized legislatures to close schools rather than desegregate them. By September of 1956, [Georgia Governor] Talmadge was declaring that 'no amount of force whatever can compel desegregation of white and Negro schools,' while Governor-elect Marvin Griffin was announcing 'come hell or high water, race will not be mixed in Georgia schools.'"[64] Whites' staunch opposition to *Brown* cannot be understated nor can it be overlooked when examining the educational realities of black children.

The stories of access dominated by opposition are important in documenting the experiences of black students after *Brown*. Even though scholars have documented that white resistance occurred, oftentimes researchers fail to connect how white opposition and black students' struggle for educational equality are inextricably linked. To truly understand the educational experiences of black children, post-*Brown*, we must understand how white resistance constrained instructional opportunities for black children in white schools. As importantly, the literature fails to consider that a majority of black children were not even in these schools but were continuing with the unequal educational opportunities sanctioned under *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. According to Derrick Bell, "The purpose of these policies [*Plessy*] were not simply to exclude or segregate but to subordinate those who, based on their color and without regard to their accomplishments, were presumed to be inferior to any white person no matter how low or ignorant."[65] The unequal distribution of funds did create a standard in which black students, teachers, principals, and schools were considered inferior to whites. Walker argued even when students fondly remember their teachers and principals their recounting of the schools always included them as having "meager materials, inadequate

[64] Klarman, *Massive Resistance*, 21-22.
[65] Bell, *Silent Covenant*, 13.

facilities, unequal funding of schools and teachers, the lack of bus transportation, and the failure of school boards to respond to black parents' requests."[66] Consistent with this conclusion, educational inequalities continued to dominate the experiences of black children in a post-*Brown* era.

Black Youth Respond

Scholarship about black student activism illuminates how the concept of student activism has changed over the years.[67] Researchers who focus on the activism of black students, within and outside of academic institutions, complicate how we conceptualize what it means for youth to have agency and advocate for equality. Also, the concept of student activism is challenged because some scholars have portrayed young students as either leaders or challengers of the direction and purpose of the movement.

Arguably, the most noted example of black youth advocating for equal education took place in Virginia, prior to the *Brown* decision, where a student led movement resulted in one of the five cases that made up *Brown v. Board*.[68] The seminal work of Richard Kluger analyzed the historical significance of Moton High School. In addition to illustrating how the event forwarded the move towards desegregation, it also illustrated how fundamental black children's participation was in the fight for educational equality.

Prior to the protest, Kluger suggested that the students attending Moton acted separately from adults when discussing ways to improve the school conditions.[69] Once the students decided that going on strike was the best method to use, Kluger's analysis

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[66] Walker, *Highest Potential,* 1.
[67] For earlier accounts of student activism read Anthony Orum, *Black Students in Protest: A Study of the Origins of the Black Student Movement*. (Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association, 1968).
[68] Robert Smith, *They Closed Their Schools: Prince Edward County Virginia, 1951-1964* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1965).
[69] Also read Richard Wormser, *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2004).

supports the premise that the strike at Moton High School was student led. Barbara Johns is given credit for initiating the strike and coming up with the demands that the students of Moton articulated. Barbara Johns is described by Kluger as a quiet young lady, who was known for her intelligence and attractiveness. However, it was her affiliation with the Future Homemakers of America and her election to the student council that ignited her activism. Being a member of certain organizations allowed her to experience life outside of Farmville, which also gave her the opportunity to compare her educational experience to others.

By Johns' junior year, she felt empowered enough to do something about the educational injustices taking place at Moton High. After making her frustrations known to a teacher who challenged her to "do something about it," she began putting her plan into action.[70] Her initial move was to make other students aware of the injustices and she did this by having a meeting with the president of the student body, Carrie Stokes, and her brother John. Once Johns acquired the services of other students, she suggested that the students strike if no improvements were made to their school. Kluger stated,

> At the appointed moment in the auditorium, 450 students and a faculty of two dozen teachers less one principal hushed as the stage curtains opened. The student strike committee was seated behind the rostrum. Standing at it and in command of the suddenly murmuring room was Barbara Rose Johns. She asked the teachers to leave, and as the excitement grew, most of them obliged. And then the beautiful sixteen-year-old girl at the rostrum told her schoolmates what was in her heart. It was time that Negroes were treated equally with whites. It was time that they had a decent high school. It was time for the students themselves to do something about it. They were going to march out of school then and there and they were going to stay out until the white community responded properly. The Farmville jail was too small to hold all of them, and none of them would be punished if they acted together and held fast to their resolve. In the long run, said

[70] For more information on Johns exchange with her teacher, read Smith, *They Closed Their Schools.*

> Barbara Johns, things would never be really equal until they attended school with white students on a non-segregated basis.[71]

Johns believed, "[they] had to do it [themselves] . . . and [they] would have to take the first step."[72] Although the strike did not result in achieving any of the children's demands, students were able to bring attention to the educational inequalities that were taking place in Virginia. In addition to explaining how a student led strike in rural Virginia yielded real results, the work of Smith and Kluger also showed the obligation black children felt to advocate for a better educational system. The black children's activism at Moton High School suggests two points about the advocacy of black students. First, their activism was not always affiliated with an organization or involved adults. Secondly, black youth did not overtly seek permission from their parents, teachers, or principals when they felt compelled to stand up for educational equality.

More contemporary works illuminate how black youth responded to educational injustices and white opposition. In 2003, *The Journal of African American History* dedicated the majority of its spring volume to student activism. Articles in the journal investigated a number of ways in which black students—college and high school—fought for educational rights. Dionne Danns examined how high school students in Chicago's public schools fought for a quality education, while James Collins illustrated how the NAACP Youth Councils and youth advisor Dorothy Williams lead civil rights protests in Pittsburgh. The importance of the articles is that each illustrated how black students were "discontent over the inferior quality of public schooling they were receiving" and decided to actively participate in the fight for equality in the North as well as the South. The common theme throughout each article is that black students were frustrated with

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[71] Kluger, *Simple Justice,* 469.
[72] Ibid, 470.

centuries of educational injustices and they used that frustration to organize and mobilize against those injustices.[73]

The educational inequalities and white opposition oftentimes fueled the frustration and activism of black students; however, their activism was not always welcomed by adults, which sometimes contributed to the students' frustration. Adults reacted differently to their children participating in the fight for equal education. Several excerpts from the scholarship on black schools provide a window to understanding the beliefs and activism of black children and a means to understand the different philosophies adults held about their actions. For example, Vanessa Siddle Walker discussed how the black students of Caswell County High School (CCHS) walked out of class to participate in a protest. It is evident that Walker writes from the perspective of the principal because she does not investigate why the children participated in the protest or who orchestrated the protest. In contrast, she notes the principal and the elder faculty members were disappointed because of their students' involvement in the protest. She stated, "He [Dr. Dillard] chided the students for moving too quickly and not taking the time to think through the implications of their move . . . Adults, he believed—not children—should assume the risks."[74] Walker's work reiterates that some adults believed that children had no role in the struggle for equality regardless of the students' aspirations to participate.

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[73] Dionne Danns, "Chicago High School Students' Movement for Quality Public Education, 1966-1971," *The Journal of African American History*, 88, (Spring, 2003) 138; Also read James Collins,"Taking the Lead: Dorothy Williams, NAACP Youth Councils, and Civil Rights Protests in Pittsburgh, 1961-1964," *The Journal of African American History*, 88, (Spring, 2003); V.P. Franklin, "Introduction: African American Student Activism in the 20th Century," *The Journal of African American History*, 88, (Spring 2003).

[74] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 193.

In contrast to Walker, who described how black youth participation in the protest at one school was quelled by the principal, David Cecelski showed camaraderie between students and adults at other schools. He demonstrates how both black parents and students protested against one-way desegregation plans occurring in Hyde County, North Carolina and the closing of black schools. He stated, "At first, the school boycott leaders included few children. Their parents had brought them to protest meetings and made the decision to withdraw them from school. Early in the boycott, however, hundreds of young people became activists and leaders, often demonstrating more dynamism and creativity than their parents."[75] The parents and children did not want to see their school close, so they boycotted for an entire year. According to Cecelski, as the strike continued, black children took more of a leadership role because of the investment they had in their black schools, O.A. Peay and Davis School. He wrote,

> Student protests reached into every corner of North Carolina. Deeply shaken by both racist educational climates and their own sense of dislocation, black students staged large demonstrations in almost every eastern county and in the Piedmont cities with large black populations, including Durham, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Charlotte, and Statesville. Black students boycotted classes, white hate groups lashed out against them, students and police clashed, political leaders enacted curfews, and sometimes schools shut down entirely.[76]

Black students and adults advocated with extreme vigor because these institutions were more than just schools; they reflected the culture of the black community in Hyde County. Black adults and children were willing to march, strike, and even go to jail to save their institutions.

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[75] David Cecelski. *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 100.
[76] ibid, 172.

Although Walker and Cecelski's works are more about the distinctive value the black community placed on their educational institutions than a focus on student activism, each work demonstrates that black adults were not the only ones' fighting for equal education. Both scholars characterized black students' willingness to participate in a protest. However, Cecelski portrays how the response from Hyde County was very similar to the reaction that took place in Grenada, Mississippi. He stated, "the troopers arrested fifty-two of the demonstrators . . . The children crowded into the musty brick jail . . .The protests had already filled so many of the closer jails that Sheriff Cahoon transferred a dozen girls to the Greene County jail in Snow Hill."[77] Cecelski, more so than Walker, demonstrated that black youth were present during protests and how pivotal they were in preventing the closing of O.A. Peay and Davis schools. Both authors illustrate that black students participated in some form of protest, but neither author examines the protest from the students' perspective so we know that students participated but we know very little about the motives behind their participation.

Whereas Smith, Kluger, Walker, and Cecelski described different ways black children participated in some form of protest, Ellen Levine in *Freedom's Children* examined what motivated students to participate. She showed how black children felt obligated to improve the educational system. She argued that they were interested in fighting for freedom and that black children's presence along with their persistence during the Civil Rights Movement were invaluable and, without those freedom children, very little would have been accomplished. She stated, "There were thousands of young people like those who have told their stories in these pages. Collectively, it is one story of a movement for rights and justice that was forcing the segregated South to undergo

[77] Ibid, 107-109.

painful change[s]. These young activists were transformed by this movement, and by their involvement they transformed the lives of those around them."[78]

Unlike other works on this time period, Levine focused entirely on black children and their activism. Using oral history, her participants are allowed to recall their experiences as children and tell their stories in their own words. In the only chapter dedicated to education, "Different Classrooms," she portrayed black students who entered all white schools as activists and found that most of her participants experienced some form of verbal and/or physical mistreatment. She also discussed how they persevered despite white hostility. She concluded that their perseverance was a form of activism. Levine's work is definitely important because she explained how black children were influenced by the Movement, while simultaneously challenging our ideas of activism and who the major actors of the Movement were. In essence, Levine showed how black children fought for freedom, thereby, making them freedom's children.

Black youth continuing to fight despite the constant mental and physical abuse can be explained, in part, by the social climate of their time. Gael Graham, Kelechi Ajunwa, and Rebecca de Schweinitz examined student activism from a much broader lens than previous works discussed. Unlike scholars who argued that black students' participation in the fight for equality was influenced primarily by adults and/or organizations, Graham and Ajunwa argued that it was primarily the heightened sense of societal consciousness that fueled youth activism. According to Graham, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the Feminist Movement, and eventually the Anti-War Movement created an "age of protest," which naturally influenced high school

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[78] Ellen Levine. *Freedom's Children: Young Civil Rights Activists tell their own Stories*. (New York: Puffin Books, 1993) 142.

students, both black and white, to create a Student Movement. She described how black students were already actively participating in the fight for equality prior to the 1960s; nevertheless, desegregation created a host of issues that high schools throughout the country had to face, which increased their activism.[79]

This increased level of activism, in conjunction with America's new ideas of childhood and the increased frustration of children themselves, de Schweinitz argued, accounts for the increase in children's participation for racial equality. Regardless of what spawned the activism of children—*Brown*, the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, an increased sense of moral and social consciousness, or shifting ideas of childhood—it is undeniable that black youth responded to a number of educational injustices taking place during the period.[80]

Other works that focus on the activism of black students, outside of academic institutions, have also contributed to the literature on youth activism. Horace Huntley and John W. McKerley in *Foot Soldiers for Democracy* and Robert Mayer in *When the Children Marched* depict how black children in Birmingham, Alabama actively participated in the fight for equality. Both are essential works because the stories are told from the children's perspective. Huntley and McKerley stated, "In Birmingham during the 1960s, history chose the children to stand in the eye of the storm. They rose and responded to the occasion. From their number came untold stories of courage, acts both

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[79] Gael Graham, *Young Activists: American High School Students in the Age of Protest* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2006); Kelechi Ajunwa, "It's our school too: Youth activism as educational reform, 1951--1979" (Ph.D., Temple University, 2011), http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/dissertations/docview/898984727/abstract/13B24C6C1DC89C247/1?accountid=10747; Jon Hale, "'The Student as a Force for Social Change': THe Mississippi Freedom Schools and Student Engagement," *Journal of African American History* 96, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 325–347.

[80] Graham, *Young Activists*; De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World*.

large and small."[81] Several scholars have stated that black children never asked for the circumstances which they encountered. However, research that centers the agency of black children often reminds us that forced circumstances, particularly during the Civil Rights and Black Power Era, often resulted in activism. Even though neither of these works discuss education in any great detail, the authors illustrate how necessary black children were in the fight for equality.

Robert Mayer, similar to Huntley and McKerley, focused on student activism outside of educational facilities and described how black students led a number of protests. Mayer used a quote from a high school junior, Cleveland Donald, which reiterates the leadership role of some of the students. He stated, "we'll march to freedom tomorrow, to our parents, we say, 'we wish you'd come along with us. But, if you won't, at least don't try to stop us."[82] Mayer gives several more examples of black children organizing and participating in the fight for equality. In addition to depicting the agency and advocacy demonstrated by black children in Birmingham, he also explained how young black activists helped change the course of Birmingham history and by doing so helped change the course of the South. He stated, "The world will never forget the thousands of children and adults who gave up their own physical safety and freedom and went to jail to secure the safety and freedom of all men."[83] They walked out of classes,

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[81] Horace Huntley and John W. McKerley, eds., *Foot Soldiers for Democracy: The Men, Women, and Children of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2009) xx.
[82] Robert Mayer, *When the Children Marched: The Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2008), 140; Also read Jill Titus, "Living on the Frontlines: Black Teenagers on the Move to Freedom," *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, (2.3), 2009 for more information on the conflict that occurred between youth and adults.
[83] Ibid, 120

marched, went to jail, were attacked by police dogs, and had pressured water hoses turned on them and instead of being intimidated, they continued to fight.[84]

Black youth participation in the fight for equal education was extremely important because, as Dionne Danns argues, they realized that limited educational opportunities also meant limited societal opportunities.[85] Therefore, when we view student activism on a continuum, we see their resistance to inequality was constant and their belief was unwavering. In sum, black student's participation in some form of protest can be seen throughout the scholarly works examined in this section. As a result of more scholars focusing on student activism, particularly black youth, we know much more today about their struggle for freedom than we knew in the past. However, as V.P. Franklin suggested, there is more to learn about the activism of black youth after the *Brown* decision. Very few scholars have sought to define equal education from the perspective of black youth. Based on the works discussed, it appears that the underlying assumption was that students' ultimate goal was desegregation. However, only by examining the educational experiences of black youth coupled with their activism can we begin to answer how they operationalized equal education and refused to accept unequal education. Also, illuminating the different ways they faced educational injustices and responded to white opposition illustrates that neither the inequities nor youth activism were fringe events.

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[84] For more examples of how black children participated in the Civil Rights Movement, read Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).
[85] For more information on how educational opportunities are linked to society opportunities read Dionne Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organizing in Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971*(New York: Routledge, 2003).

**Black Youth and Organizations**, It is not uncommon, in scholarly discourse, for a discussion on student activism to include monumental events, like the sit-ins by the North Carolina A&T students or the Freedom Riders organized by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). College students and national organizations have had a stronghold on student activism for decades. Rarely does our historical memory force us to recall the activism of youth and when it does we usually talk about the Little Rock Nine or the NAACP youth council. Although both are historical and include important figures, a more in depth examination of the relationship between black children and Civil Rights and Black Power organizations is important. Although scholars have discussed how essential young people were to the NAACP and SNCC, very few have delved into how essential organizations were to the activism of black youth.

Black students' participation in the fight for equality has a long history. Jennifer Ritterhouse included a portrait in *Growing Up Jim Crow* from July 28, 1917 of black children participating in a "Silent March Parade" organized by the NAACP. Ritterhouse discussed how DuBois envisioned his *Brownies' Book* to be used for "educating children for activism."[86] Although the book did not last long, the debate on whether children should be allowed to participate in the fight for equality was just beginning. The NAACP realized the value of black children so they created the NAACP Youth Council in the late 1930s, which gave black youth a platform to articulate their concerns.

In "'We Must March Forward!'Juanita Jackson and the Origins of the NAACP Youth Movement," Thomas Bynum explained how the NAACP Youth Council

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[86] Jennifer Ritterhouse. *Growing Up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 222.

"provided an outlet for black youth activism."[87] The organization appealed to the youth because it dealt with educational issues that were of utmost concern to them. According to Bynum, "the NAACP youth groups organized rallies and protest over the extreme racial inequalities in public education, [such as] equal lengths of school terms for black and white students . . . equal school transportation, equality in school facilities, equipment, and per capita expenditures for black and white public education."[88] Scholarship that examined student activism pre-*Brown* and after *Brown* reveal that black students were definitely concerned with educational inequities. Also, as Bynum's work depicts, collaboration existed between black students and black organizations resisting those injustices.

Other scholars have also credited the NAACP Youth Council with being one of the first organizations that understood how essential black students' participation was in the fight for equality as it actively recruited black youth. For example, Derrick Aldridge's work revealed DuBois' vision for youth activism. According to Aldridge, "Du Bois adamantly preached that black youth needed to aggressively attack Jim Crow segregation in the United States and reconceptualize American racism in a broader international context . . . encourage the youth to expose the racial and class oppression in the South through the press and use it to publicize their activities."[89]

Researchers, like Ritterhouse and de Schweinitz, in a similar manner as Bynum and Aldridge, suggest that the NAACP had the first legitimate youth organization that

[87] Thomas L. Bynum. "'We Must March Forward!': Juanita Jackson and the Origins of the NAACP Youth Movement." *The Journal of African American History*, 94 (Fall 2009) 488.
[88] Ibid, 497.
[89] Derrick P. Aldridge, *The Educational Thought of W.E.B Du Bois: An Intellectual History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 113.

engaged in a form of "militancy," during the 1930s and 1940s.[90] The work of De Schweinitz focused on the history of black youth's involvement in protest and how their affiliation with organizations like the NAACP influenced them to participate in the Movement. She argued that youth activism must be examined within the context of the NAACP's youth council because it was during the 1930s that black student activism became more evident.[91] As Ritterhouse's work suggested, the youth council prepared black children for activism. Furthermore, de Schweinitz stated, "The NAACP expanded its youth program when it became clear that black youth wanted to actively participate in the civil rights movement.

During the Great Depression, at the same time that public and private agencies began to pay greater attention to the problems of youth, young people began to play an increasingly vital and militant role in the association and the movement."[92] Although de Schweinitz's work portrayed how important the NAACP was in providing a space that black children needed, she also examined how the NAACP needed the youth.[93] Her work showed a definite connection between black youth activism and organizations, like the NAACP and SNCC. Throughout her study, most of the discussion on youth activism is done within the context of the NAACP's youth council; nevertheless, she also portrayed that by the 1960s SNCC had a presence among black children. She stated, "One teenage SNCC activist explained that although students had 'long been talked about and

[90] Militancy was used by Ritterhouse and de Schweinitz when discussing the NAACP youth group.
[91] For more information on the NAACP's Youth Council read Thomas L. Bynum, "'We Must march Forward!' 487-508.
[92] De Schweinitz, *If We Could Change the World*, 153.
[93] Ibid, 192.

impressionable,' 'these very students' were 'forming definite convictions about the world around them' and taking 'the lead in our society in putting their convictions to the test."[94]

Scott Baker's history of South Carolina school desegregation is very similar to de Schweinitz in several ways. Both agree that youth activism began prior to the 1950s, although *Brown* played an influential role in accelerating the participation of black youth.[95] Moreover, both authors suggest that black youth participated in protests because of organizational support. Baker's work differed slightly from de Schweinitz because he examined the activism of black students who advocated on behalf of educational equality. Even though he suggested that students' involvement was due to organizational support, those in his study were clearly leading the protests in South Carolina.

Baker devoted an entire chapter to black youth, entitled "Disorder and Desegregation," in which he explained how black students led the NAACP in renewing their fight for desegregation in South Carolina. He stated, "Influenced by the activism of students, the citywide PTA council and the local African American Teachers' Association planned a boycott to dramatize overcrowding in black schools, classes. . . Stirred by the discipline and determination of students, teachers, and parents, NAACP leaders renewed the legal campaign to desegregate the schools.[96] Baker used the sit-ins that occurred in Charleston and Orangeburg, South Carolina as evidence of how vital students were in the fight for equal education. Furthermore, "Student activism, stirred the NAACP," Baker stated, "which renewed its campaign to desegregate schools, colleges,

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[94] Ibid, 243.
[95] For more information on the connection between black students and organizations read Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Also for a more comprehensive study on SNCC, read Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
[96] R. Scott Baker. *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for the Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) 144-145.

and universities."[97] His work further complicates the historiography of black student activism and organizational support because he portrayed how a mutual partnership existed among students, parents, and organizations—a finding that is similar to Celeski's work.

These earlier descriptions notwithstanding, a review of the research on black organizations revealed that very few scholars have examined the link between black youth organizational affiliation and their activism. In fact, when any form of student activism is discussed, SNCC typically becomes the model for engagement. While the larger narrative surrounding SNCC usually focuses on key members like Diane Nash, John Lewis, Stokely Carmichael, and Ella Baker, the ideological transition of the organization, or the organization's demise, the contributions made by members of SNCC who were in primary and secondary school during the period are equally important.[98] Raymond Arsenault, although briefly, showed that black high school students had a presence in SNCC. His work mainly focused on the agency and advocacy demonstrated by the young people who became known as the Freedom Riders. He illustrates the constant danger the activists faced and how they stood up for equality and rejected the ideas and practices of Jim Crow. These findings align with David Halberstam and Clayborne Carson's work on SNCC.[99] Although Arsenault's work is an exemplary

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[97] Ibid, 134.

[98] Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011); John Lewis, *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (Harcourt Brace, 1999).

[99] The earliest work on SNCC was by Emily Stoper, *The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee: The Growth of Radicalism in a Civil Rights Organization* (New York: Carlson Publishing, 1989), which was written as a dissertation in 1968: Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*.(New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 86. Also read, David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998).His work is useful to anyone who is interested in examining the history and agency of young children involved in SNCC. His work is a compilation of "children" stories who

illustration of how SNCC fought against the social and economic injustices, researchers' tendency to focus on the college age students of SNCC, directly or indirectly reduces the attention given to younger activists. SNCC's membership, as some scholars have shown, consisted of students who were not in their late teens or early twenties, but were barely teenagers. Therefore, the historiography on SNCC does not fully examine the level of involvement that students in primary and secondary schools had within the organization.

In sum, the literature reveals how black youth faced a myriad of educational inequities from 1954-1972 due to several factors. The first set of scholarly works highlight the imperfections of *Brown*. The case was flawed for many reasons but the primary flaw was that it could not change the hearts and minds of those comfortable with the status quo. The fact was, *Brown* was supposed to be implemented by those who did not agree with the ruling and they found ways to circumvent the law. Unfortunately, the educational experiences of black youth were gravely affected.

The second section underscores the strength of white opposition. Although the larger narrative attempts to downplay the frequency and the vitriol of southern whites, scholars have done a laudable job exposing how active many whites were in maintaining the status quo and, thereby, creating an educational climate that was not beneficial to black students. Also, a number of black schools during the time period continued to be underfunded, which made it difficult to meet the basic needs of black students. Too often, black youth were surrounded by prevailing educational conditions that sought to subordinate and not educate.

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participated in the Civil Rights Movement. The stories of Diane Nash, John Lewis, and others are told, which describes the different arenas that young black people fought against racial inequality.

The third section of the literature review, ironically, portrays how the hostile nature of the South influenced the activism of countless black youth. Scholarly work showed how black students responded and the ways they fought against an unjust system. Scholars have illuminated that youth activism was not confined to academic institutions but it expanded beyond education. As Halbersham's work concluded, "black children were involved in the fight to dismantle Jim Crow."

The final section of the literature review exposes an affiliation between black youth and national organizations that dates back to the early 20th century. Several scholars examine the havens black students found in certain organizations, but very few investigated how the NAACP and SNCC relied on youth. However, the narratives that ignore the contributions youth made to national organizations are beginning to be challenged. For example, Jon Hale discussed how the relationship between SNCC and student engagement was mutual because it allowed SNCC to set up Freedom Schools while black youth "learned about opportunities to participate in the civil rights campaign."[100] Furthermore, in a pilot study, I sought to address these omissions as well. Findings revealed that a strong relationship existed between student activism and organizational activity.

This study incorporated lessons learned from my pilot study and seek to address the rhetoric of *Brown*, the educational realities of black students, the ways white opposition contributed to those realities, the ways black students responded, and the role of Civil Rights and Black Power organizations. Although scholarly works have done a laudable job highlighting some of the shortcomings of *Brown*, exposing the frequency of

[100] Hale, "'The Student as a Force for Social Change': The Mississippi Freedom Schools and Student Engagement."

white resistance, including some activism of black youth, and illustrating the linkage between organizations and black students, the story is largely fragmented. Scholars have separated these into four distinct topics, neglecting their shared relationship. This is an omission that needs to be explored.

### Methodology

History is often referred to as the gateway into restructuring events that influence people to rethink certain events they initially considered as fact. Allan J Lichtman and Valerie French offer the following definition of history: "History provides a glimpse of what people have thought and felt in times and places very different from our own. It reveals their success and their failures, loves and hates."[101] According to Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider, "students of history must learn that the business of an historian is to make judgments and to establish causal relationships between facts; [they] must place them in some significant pattern and order and not be a reporter."[102] Therefore, history must always do more than just report events; it must illustrate why events were important and the relevance they have to the present by using sound data to support the findings.

Considering the complexity and the multiple components of the story, I drew on the theory and methodology of social history. Social history was ideal for this study because it attempts to conceptualize and synthesize human agency and the social process that influence agency or as Paul Johnson stated, it "humanizes and historicizes plain

[101]Allan J. Lichtman and Valerie French, Historians *and the Living Past: The Theory and Practice of Historical Study* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1978), xv.
[102] Norman F. Cantor and Richard I. Schneider, *How to Study History* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc, 1967), 19.

people."[103] Participants in this study grew up during a period when their agency was influenced by a number of factors and social history allowed me to account for those societal influences. Elizabeth Todd-Breland stated, [social history] helps contextualize and probe the relationships between historical actors within social networks."[104] In addition to understanding my participants' agency and the societal events that influenced their agency, social history allowed for a complete story. As James Henretta noted, "the 'actions' of individuals—their emotions, their values, and their behaviors—remain the ultimate point . . . a social history written in terms . . . focuses narrowly but interprets broadly, critically surveys the past with reference to the present, and most important, records the paradoxical and even tragic history of human agency."[105]

Along with social history, this study utilized a case study design and oral interviews to construct an interweaving narrative. A case study design provided an in-depth understanding of the cyclical relationship that existed after *Brown*. Using southwest Georgia—Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie—as a site, I was able to investigate the ways the *Brown* decision was implemented or ignored and how black and white southwest Georgians responded to the landmark case. While Georgia did not have the public volatile opposition to *Brown* as other southern states—Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas—by no means was the state any less of an opponent of the watershed case. In fact, politicians in Georgia campaigned just as strongly against integration as politicians in Alabama, Mississippi, and Arkansas. Governor Marvin Griffin, who campaigned

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[103] Paul E. Johnson, "Reflections: Looking Back at Social History," *Reviews in American History* 39, no. 2 (2011): 381, doi:10.1353/rah.2011.0059.
[104] Elizabeth Todd-Breland, "'To Reshape and Redefine Our World' : African American Political Organizing for Education in Chicago, 1968-1988," Dissertation (The University of Chicago, 2010), 2.
[105] James A. Henretta, "Social History as Lived and Written," *The American Historical Review* 84, no. 5 (December 1, 1979): 1322, doi:10.2307/1861469; Johnson, "Reflections."

against integration, is one example. He stated in his inaugural speech that "he would protect Georgia's segregated way of life come hell or high water."[106]

Even though Georgia was extremely conscious of her national image, particularly in the state's largest metropolis—Atlanta—policies passed by state and local officials and the social ethos illuminated that educational equality was not a priority. As John Roche stated in his seminal work, "by 1958, Georgia's plan to resist integration was firmly in place . . . that there was no real effort made over five years to integrate schools in Georgia."[107] Therefore, Georgia is an ideal state for a case study because of its opposition to *Brown* and its political and social influence during this time period. Although portrayed as being a racially progressive southern state, numerous events in the state demonstrate that it was not progressive.[108] The benefit of focusing on a particular southern state rather than examining accounts from across the South is that "we gain better understanding of the whole."[109]

Oral histories, which were not used in the pilot study, were central in providing insight the archival records were incapable of revealing. Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Quinlan state that "oral history represents one of many ways to document the past. It brings an immediacy and an ability to explore subjective nuances to a study of the past. It allows researchers to probe beneath the surface of written records to discover not just

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[106] Christopher Meyers, ed., *The Empire State of the South: Georgia History in Documents and Essays* (Mercer University Press, 2008), 297. Meyers noted that an example of Governor Griffin's opposition to *Brown* was the passage of the Interposition Resolution which "declared the *Brown* decision 'null and void and of no effect.'"

[107] Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 37.

[108] Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2001).

[109] John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

what happened but how and why."[110] Since newspapers and other archival records provide sterile descriptions, the interviews were an important means through which I understood the explanations participants provided for their behavior.

For this study, I located informants using several electronic databases. From these initial contacts, the goal was to generate a network of informants in each of the geographic areas where the archives documented a form of student resistance. Utilizing what Michelle Fosters terms "community nominations," I was able to speak with key informants. According to Foster, this process "is a selection process [she] developed in which the names of teachers were solicited through direct contact with individual black communities."[111] Community nominations were very important for this study because the newspaper articles rarely named the students who were involved. Likewise, the articles oftentimes did not list the names of whites who opposed desegregation or any form of educational equality. Community nomination expanded my knowledge of the event beyond the superintendent or police officers whose names were included in accounts.

The ability to investigate below the surface, in part, depends on the types of questions being asked. As a result, the interviews were structured as open-ended questions which gave the interviewee the ability to "choose his or her own answer" (See Appendix A for sampling of questions). Although the interviews followed an open-end structure, there were instances when the participant did not have knowledge of a particular event so closed-ended questions were used in those instances.[112]

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[110] Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009) , 6; Also see Thad Sitton, George L. Mehaffy, and O. L. Davis, Jr. *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (and Others)* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983).
[111] Michelle Foster, *Black Teachers on Teaching* (New York: The New Press, 1997), xx.
[112] Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (New York: AltaMira Press, 2005).

## Data Sources

Two primary data sources were utilized for this dissertation. I relied heavily on archival documents. However, I also used interviews as a means to further illuminate document accounts. See Appendix B for an overview of the relationship between the research questions and data sources.

Newspapers were an invaluable resource for several reasons. First, newspapers with a large readership often discussed issues pivotal to the black community. Second, newspapers are an important means of exposing locations in Georgia, such as Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie, where student activism and white opposition occurred. For the dissertation, I included the newspaper sources utilized in the pilot study. However, I also expanded my search by incorporating local newspapers in the sites.

In addition to newspapers, other archival materials, such as school board minutes, memoirs, and organizational files, were used. These include (1) The King Center in Atlanta, Georgia; (2) Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library (MARBL) of Emory University; (3) Auburn Avenue Library; (4) Robert W. Woodruff Library Atlanta University Center; and (5) local school district archival collections, such as the Lake Blackshear Regional Library in Americus, Georgia. These collections proved valuable because they provided a context to help explain black youth experiences and behaviors and they revealed how school administrators responded to black students' demands.

### Data Analysis

Newspaper articles, board minutes, memoirs, and organizational files were reviewed using several different levels of analysis. For example, a document summary sheet was used with archival materials, which includes newspapers, memoirs,

organizational files, and board minutes (See Appendix C). Materials found during the initial inquiry relevant to the research questions and time period were analyzed and went through several levels of coding. As I examined documents, I kept memoranda, including document and content summaries from each stage of the document analysis. In addition, I used appendices and matrices to determine each document's usefulness and relevance. In the second level of analysis, I employed a method of interrogation that categorized the documents based on location and action.

Oral interviews, like archival data, had to go through several levels of analysis. Based on Wilma K. Baum's work, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History*, there are several levels that a researcher must go through before the interview can be used as data.[113] Those stages are collecting, analyzing, coding, and determining what materials are useful. For this study, after each interview, I listened to the entire interview and compared my field notes with the text of the interview and with archival material collected from the pilot study. This preliminary analysis was useful because it allowed me to see if a follow up interview was needed. If so, I determined the specific questions I needed to ask. After the preliminary analysis was completed, I transcribed the initial interviews which gave me the opportunity to analyze the interviews again. After transcribing the interviews, I shared the transcriptions with my participants. After they verified the transcriptions, follow-up interviews were performed to fill in any missing information. All of the follow-up interviews were transcribed by Datalyst, a transcription company based in Chicago Illinois.

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[113] Wilma K. Baum, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1978); Sommer and Quinlan, *The Oral History Manual*, 2002

Once the interviews were transcribed, I began descriptive coding, which is also referred to as first-level coding. Once I had a "feel" for what the participants were saying, then I began a second-level coding (inferential coding). The second-level coding allowed me to "pull together materials into smaller and more meaningful patterns," to compare with other forms of data so the story is complete and accurate.[114]

Understanding that oral history is not without flaws, I triangulated the data in an effort to counter romanticized memory. Additionally, I continued to rely on archival materials as a way of verifying the plausibility of a particular event. Because historical studies are done to explain and/or infer new knowledge about an event or people, the way I analyzed and coded the interviews and the archival data were extremely important. Explanation or inference needs to be supported by knowledge. Therefore, to address external validity, I examined the archival materials as well as the interviews with questions in mind such as: "Is it genuine? Is it the original copy? Who wrote it? Who said it? Where? When? Under what conditions?" [115] To account for internal validity, the primary consideration was, "Is it physically possible for the events described to have occurred this close together in time."[116] Internal validity was especially important because of the method being relied on to construct this story.

## How the Story is Told

A history that encapsulates the educational experiences, agency, and activism of black youth, white opposition—nationally and locally—and the ways national organizations organized nationally and locally has a number of moving parts. Thus, the

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[114] Keith Punch, *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA; Sage Publications, 2005), 200
[115] Ibid, 541.
[116] Ibid, 542.

dissertation is structured in a way that elevates these moving parts and examines how they are all interconnected. Chapter 2 provides a national context by portraying how the different responses to *Brown* created a culture of progress, regress, hopes, and doubts which greatly influenced public education on a national and local level. Furthermore, chapter 2 elevates the pivotal role organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Color People (NAACP) and leaders, like A. Phillip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, played in organizing youth after the *Brown* decision. Then the chapter interrogates how youth activism evolved from being primarily about integration to including equal resources, better housing, better paying jobs, and access into public facilities. This evolution drastically changed the tone of the Civil Rights Movement and became the foundation for youth activism entering the 1960s. The chapter ends with an examination of how the evolution of youth activism took root in Georgia, more specifically southwest Georgia.[117]

Chapter 3 explores the ways in which a small genteel town known as Tifton became one of the first small metropolises in Georgia to realize that the Civil Rights Movement was not confined to large cities like Atlanta or Albany. Nor was civil rights just a federal issue. Tifton had been able to function under the ethos of segregation since its founding but this would all change in the 1960s. In 1962, black youth, led by Mr. Walter Dykes and Mr. Major Wright, in Tifton began to challenge the customs of Jim Crow, particularly the educational inequities the segregated system produced. Inspired by events they attended where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. discussed what it meant to fight for justice, they returned to Tifton determined to organize and fight for equality. This

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[117] Charles M Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1996).

chapter investigates the origin of the Tifton youth movement and those key actors who made the movement possible. Additionally, this chapter examines the issues black youth believed were salient to them, the ways in which they fought to have those issues addressed, and the opposition they received as they fought to improve their educational experiences.

Similar to chapter 3, chapter 4 interrogates how essential black youth participation was to the Americus Movement. Because Americus, Georgia is so close to Albany, the Albany Movement greatly influenced the events that took place in Americus. However, Americus did not have an Albany State University to recruit participants from so youth attending primary and secondary school were pivotal. This chapter examines how the Americus Movement came into existence by focusing on a couple of events that had national implications. Moreover, this chapter investigates what made a number of black youth join the movement and what were the issues they rallied behind. The Americus Movement illuminates why the struggle for equality included the need to be treated as a human being.

Chapter 5 illuminates how dilapidated academic structures along with the black high school's accreditation being revoked spurred black youth to protest. This protest took place in Moultrie, Georgia which is located in southwest Georgia. The customs of Moultrie were similar to those of Tifton and Americus, which meant that black youth faced a number of injustices. This chapter, however, focuses primarily on the ways black youth conceptualized educational improvements and the ways they organized and protested to see those improvements fulfilled. Black youth in Moultrie envisioned an

educational system without the boundaries imposed by Jim Crow, and they fought tirelessly to see their vision accomplished.

Chapter 6 examines how desegregation was not enough to meet the demands proposed by black youth in Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie. Furthermore, the chapter portrays how pivotal the activism of black youth and the organizing from organizations, like SNCC, were to public education after the *Brown* decision. Although the federal ruling created a different climate, it was black youth along with civil rights organizations that fundamentally changed public education from 1954-1972.

# Chapter 2

## "Don't Be Fooled…The Fight Has Just Begun:" White Opposition and Black Youth Activism (The National Context)

An image etched in the historical memory of *Brown vs. Board of Education* is one of Nettie Hunt sitting on the steps of the Supreme Court building with her daughter, Nickie, with one arm wrapped around the young girl and the other arm holding a newspaper that read, "HIGH COURT BANS SEGREGATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS." As Nickie looked up at her mother unsure about the world that lay ahead and as Ms. Hunt looked down at her daughter realizing the daunting journey of the past, the images and words from the newspaper created a portrait that has transcended time. The picture suggested that the relentless struggle for educational equality was finally achieved, and it captured for all generations a sense of jubilation for a number of people who thought the ruling meant an end to the inequalities that permeated throughout the public school system.[1]

Vivian Brown, in *School: The Story of American Education*, recalled how ecstatic her mother was when the Supreme Court outlawed segregation. She also remembered her father being overwhelmed with joy by the news that segregation was no longer law.[2] James Patterson noted in his work that Harlem's well known black newspaper, *Amsterdam News*, noted the decision as "the greatest victory for the Negro people since the Emancipation Proclamation" and believed it would "alleviate troubles in many other

[1] Michael J Klarman, *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South; from 1619 to the Present* (Harvard University Press, 1967).
[2] Meryl Streep, *School: The Story of American Public Education* (PBS, 2000).

fields."[3] The elation caused by the court's decision moved well beyond ordinary people and news outlets who had limited knowledge about how legal decisions were implemented. In fact, lawyers from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who worked tirelessly on the case, initially overreacted to the historic ruling. Juan Williams' work centers the NAACP's celebration night. He stated "Marshall and several of the NAACP staff went to his favorite restaurant, the Blue Ribbon, for food and drinks. . . People at the party began saying the NAACP's work is done and it was a matter of time before all the nation's schools were integrated," According to Williams, Marshall replied "I don't want any of you to fool yourselves, it's just begun, the fight has just begun."[4] Although Marshall agreed that the jubilation was warranted, his refusal to claim the case did away with second-class citizenship, educational inequality, and political and economical disenfranchisement captures the conundrum of the period.

On one hand, *Brown* dealt an indelible blow to systematic inequities because they were no longer sanctioned by federal law. On the other hand, the legal proceedings could not completely annihilate *Plessy vs. Ferguson* because of the pragmatic component that all legal decisions are susceptible to.[5] As William E. Cox stated, "While *Brown v. Board of Education* was a precedent-setting decision and is viewed as a turning point in U.S. history, it was not a thunderous explosion that rocked the foundation of discrimination.

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[3] James T. Patterson, *Brown V. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy*, Pivotal Moments in American History (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), xiv.
[4] Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* (Times Books, 1998), 229.
[5] Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011).

Rather, it was a 'law of the land' lever that civil rights advocates could use."[6] Marshall understood that the implementation of *Brown* largely depended on those who were so staunchly against the ruling. Thus, while the watershed case caused jubilation for what it had done, trepidation and hesitancy were also a warranted response because of what the case had not done. As Vanessa Siddle Walker stated, "By the time the *Brown II* decision on implementation of *Brown I* was read . . . there was enough ambiguity in the court's decision to support a legal confrontation between those who would use legislation to maintain the status quo and those who sought immediate desegregation."[7]

Marshall and certain members from the NAACP were not alone in having resonation that *Brown* would not cure the racial ills that plagued the United States, particularly in the South. For example, A. Philip Randolph postulated from the beginning that the decision was a legal exercise played out in the courts that local whites would ignore. He summed up his feelings about *Brown* in the way,  "the problem we seek to resolve is largely emotional, with roots deep in a morass of fears, frustrations, desperation, and a guilt complex born of a long history of conflict, contradiction, and confusion . . . The Supreme Court decisions of 1954 [and] 1955 . . . [have] precipitated a raging controversy. The country has been virtually split wide open into two camps [:] one camp stands for, and the other against, the public school policy of desegregation and integration."[8] Randolph's words reiterate the idea that the mid-twentieth century did not see a decrease in the struggle for educational equality due to *Brown*, which was the

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[6] William Cox, "Reflections of One Who Was There," in *The Unfinished Agenda of Brown V. Board of Education*, Landmarks in Civil Rights History (John Wiley & Sons, 2004), xxiv.
[7] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 184.
[8] Bayard Rustin and Publications of America University Inc, *The Bayard Rustin Papers*, Black Studies Research Sources (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1988).

thought from a number of Marshall's colleagues. In fact, the need for civil right organizations and laypeople to become more involved in the struggle increased after *Brown* because white opposition was so widespread.

Michael J. Klarman stated, "To be sure, *Brown*, which invalidated state-mandated racial segregation in public schools, was an enormous victory for racial equality . . . because the ruling reflected the antifascist ideology of the World War II . . . but residential segregation grew worse and [the court's decision] was almost completely nullified in the South."[9] Jason Sokol reiterated Klarman's conclusion when he stated, "While the Citizens' Councils proclaimed the day of *Brown v. Board of Education* 'Black Monday,' few white southern embraced such Manichean portraits. . . The decision did not even register on the radar of many whites."[10] Therefore, the unique amalgamation of legal demands with states' rights and individual choices with the demands of full citizenship and equality created a climate where people fought fervently to shape public education as they saw it.

**An Educational Farrago**

When Marshall foreshadowed that the "fight has just begun" he understood whites would not accept blacks as full citizens overnight because for centuries the law stated they were inferior. The majority of blacks resided in places where treating people of color as second-class citizens was an ingrained practice that dated as far back as slavery. It was also no secret that a large segment of the white population opposed any form of integration. So when the Supreme Court banned segregation in public schools it created a new idea of schools; it challenged these deeply held views. A very powerful

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[9] Klarman, *Unfinished Business*, 7–8.

[10] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 48.

constituency opposing the new vision and a frustrated group of young people, who were energetic and organized, attempting to expand the court's ruling beyond integration created an educational farrago. The ruling, coupled with white opposition and the evolution of black youth activism, quickly transformed public schools into places that encompassed progress, regress, hopes, and doubts, all combining to create a unique struggle for full citizenship and educational equality. At its core, *Brown* changed expectations and created new possibilities that had a profound impact on public education nationally and locally.

While scholars tend to focus on the successes and/or failures of *Brown*, this study suggests that it was the relationship between whites' opposition to the case and black youth's demands for equal education and full citizenship that greatly shaped public schooling after the court's decision.[11] Despite the scholastic focus on the binary conclusion of *Brown*, the ruling and the responses from the ruling are very difficult to sum up in two categories because of the various responses from blacks and whites. Those various responses inevitably contributed to the degree to which the case was or was not implemented, which invariably determined what public schools looked like after the

[11] Patterson, *Brown V. Board of Education*; James Anderson and Dara N. Byrne, eds., *The Unfinished Agenda of Brown Vs. Board of Education* (Hoboken, N.J: J. Wiley & Sons, 2004); Derrick A Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown V. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Orville Vernon Burton, *Remembering Brown at Fifty: The University of Illinois Commemorates Brown V. Board of Education* (University of Illinois Press, 2009); Byrne, Dara N, *Brown V. Board of Education: Its Impact on Public Education, 1954-2004* (Word For Word Pub. Co, 2005); Brian J Daugherity and Charles C Bolton, *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing Brown V. Board of Education* (University of Arkansas Press, 2008); H. Richard Milner and Tyrone C. Howard, "Black Teachers, Black Students, Black Communities, and Brown: Perspectives and Insights from Experts," *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 3 (July 1, 2004): 285–297, doi:10.2307/4129612; Michael J. Klarman, *Brown v. Board of Education and the civil rights movement : abridged edition of From Jim Crow to civil rights : the Supreme Court and the struggle for racial equality* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Maike Philipsen, "The Second Promise of Brown," *The Urban Review* 26, no. 4 (1994): 257–272; Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (Vintage, 2004); Bell, *Silent Covenants*.

ruling. Although the responses varied by locale, all of the responses shaped the climate of public schools because it aided in the creation of the educational farrago that was birthed after *Brown.*

Those who believed that progress was made after the case had evidence to solidify their claim. They used Clinton, Tennessee and to an extent Little Rock, Arkansas as evidence. In contrast, others who believed public schooling regressed had the closing of public schools in Prince Edward County, Virginia and a number of the black students leaving Central High in Little Rock as empirical evidence.[12] The same bifurcation in interpretation of events is also evident among those who viewed public education through the prism of hope and those who viewed it through doubt. Nonetheless, regardless of the prism one chose to view education through, the evidence suggests that public schooling encompassed collectively progress, regress, hope, and doubt in the years following the court's decision. Whether schools were being desegregated or closed to prevent desegregation or monies were being withheld or funneled to black schools, white opposition and black student advocacy united to center external and easily visible differences.

This chapter portrays how the difference in the rhetoric and the reality was based on more than the successes and failures of a legal proceeding. While the historical case had a profound impact on public education, national events, such as the Youth March for Integrated Schools in Washington, D.C., and local events, such as the Appeal for Human Rights, coupled with student's responses to shape public education and influence youth

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[12] John A Kirk, *Redefining the Color Line: Black Activism in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1940-1970* (University Press of Florida, 2002); R. C. Robert Collins Smith, *They Closed Their Schools; Prince Edward County, Virginia, 1951-1964* (University of North Carolina Press, 1965); Jill Titus, *Brown's Battleground: Students, Segregationists, and the Struggle for Justice in Prince Edward County, Virginia* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

activism in the mid-1960s to the early 1970s. As much as scholars discuss what the watershed case did or did not do, an examination of how such a confused mix transformed public schools in the aftermath of the decision is needed.

## A Reason to Hope and Doubt

Initially, the hopes of integration lay in the hands of the Supreme Court but the deliberately slow speed in which states were banning segregation, particularly in the South, quickly turned those hopes into doubts. The doubts of Thurgood Marshall and others within the black community did not stem from what took place in the courts but from the opposition displayed by local white politicians, business leaders, and lay persons. Despite the staunch opposition and the doubts that *Brown* would not fully materialize, a ray of hope remained. This hope came from an internal belief that institutions can be fundamentally transformed with the right organizational strategies and with people who were willing to implement those strategies and endure. A pamphlet entitled, "A Call" articulates this hope. "Throughout our history, dramatic action by deeply concerned people has served to awaken the whole nation to its sense of duty. . . Sincere, earnest, disciplined, and dedicated people will influence those who have not yet taken a clear stand . . . in the courts, legislature, and all areas of American life."[13]

Even though the hopes faded in the legal process, it greatly increased in black youth. In fact, black youth would become the figureheads for *Brown* and take the message of desegregation to Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C. Where the law could only go in theory, black youth would go in reality. As more youth participated in the fight for desegregation, the hope that public education would be

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[13] A. Philip Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*, Black Studies Research Sources (Bethesda, MD : University Publications of America, c1990., 1990).

different after *Brown* grew. Black youth, along with civil rights organizations, became the embodiment of hope because they took up the reins for the battle of educational equality.

One year after *Brown*, the *Atlanta Daily World* published an article citing a "quarter million children attending mixed classes in seven Jim Crow states and in Washington, DC." The primary purpose of the article was to illuminate that desegregation was working, particularly in the South. The article goes on to say, "In the twelve months since that day [May 17, 1954], information compiled by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] indicates that school desegregation has been initiated in the District of Columbia, and the City of Baltimore, in two towns in Arkansas, 29 counties in West Virginia, 30 communities in Missouri, [and] five towns in Delaware."[14] Based on the data from several southern states and a couple of border states, the article contended that the "tiny minority" of black students attending previous all white schools demonstrated that desegregation was working.

The *Atlanta Daily World* argued that *Brown* was moving education forward and critiqued other media outlets for not covering the success of the ruling. "There have been serves of unheralded instances of Negro children being welcomed by their new white classmates. To the extent to which successful integration has been ignored is something of a journalistic scandal." Furthermore, the newspaper continued "the inspired strikes, the demonstrations of resistance . . . have been widely publicized. The *Atlanta Daily World*

[14] *Atlanta Daily World,* "500 Schools Desegregated Year After Court Ruling," pg. 2, col. 5, May 17, 1955. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed April 3, 2010.

provided no data to support their claim that black students being welcomed into white schools "[was] the rule: the hate demonstrations, the exception." [15]

Based on the social and political climate in which *Brown* was passed, the conclusion made by the newspaper article is very unlikely. Little doubt exists that a few black children integrated white schools with no altercation. However, the *Atlanta Daily World*'s early assessment of the case's success in the South was undergirded more in hope than the actual experiences of most black children.

Other newspaper articles show that integration and white hostility were often intertwined. For example, On October 2, 1954—nearly five months after the *Brown* ruling—the *New York Times* published a story entitled "Baltimore Crowd Attacks 4 Pupils," that demonstrated the hostility black children faced. The article stated, "An angry crowd of 800 white adults and students attacked four Negro pupils . . . One Negro boy was punched in the face and an attempt was made to overturn a police car in which the pupils were taken away. Trouble at Southern High School, which is in the heart of a residential area largely inhabited by white and Negro industrial workers, began early in the day when picketing students appeared with signs reading, 'Negroes Not Allowed,' 'On Strike,' and 'Keep the Germs Spreading.'" Later on in the evening, the article revealed, "A Negro neighborhood in the southern section of the city, a bus carrying Negroes was stoned and a Negro was struck in the face."[16]

In addition to the violent resistance experienced by black youth, white opposition was also demonstrated through non-violent protest, which was the case in Washington,

[15] *Atlanta Daily World*, pg. 2.
[16] *New York Times*, "Baltimore Crowd Attack 4 Pupils: Negro Boy Punched in Fight Over Integration—Schools Resume in Milford," pg.18, October 2, 1954; ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed January 5, 2010.

D.C. According to the *New York Times*, a number of white students, representing seven junior high and senior high schools, protested integration by staging walkouts.[17] Their primary grievance was that they felt integration occurred too quickly. The article asserted "that they had been told a few Negroes would come in September and a few in February, whereas there are already 400 in a school of 1,000. White students were concerned about the number of black students entering their school and having to share certain spaces.

The *Atlanta Daily World* also covered this story, and it revealed that one of the grievances on the white students' petition was "they do not want to take showers with Negroes."Although a committee of students—four whites and four blacks—was created to deal with the grievances caused by integration, the articles noted that black students who entered these schools had to deal with some form of resistance. Even when white resistance was non-violent, authorities felt that violence could ignite at any given moment. The *New York Times* stated that "Negro students at Anacostia [one of the schools involved in the protest] had motorcycle escorts part of the way home," which suggested that the police felt that violence was a possibility.[18] The fact that nonviolent and violent protest erupted as a result of black children attending previously segregated schools confirms other scholarly accounts and illuminates the hostility the children experienced.

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[17] While A. Philip Randolph does not defend the effectiveness of *Brown*, he does downplay white students' role in opposing integration. In a letter sent to Sergeant William Bracey—President of the Guardians Association—he stated, "Negro and white youth are giving to the implementing of the Supreme Court decisions. American youth has taken initiative and we all have an obligation to back them up. . . in the South white youth are reveling against the irresponsible behavior of publicity hungry politicians." Based on archival data and secondary sources, Randolph portraying white youth as proponents of integration is a stretch. Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*; Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

[18] *New York Times*, "Baltimore Crowd Attack 4 Pupils; *Atlanta Daily World,* "Washington School Demonstrators Admit 'We Accomplished Nothing': Students Return to Classes After School Leaders' Plea," pg. 1, col. 4 October 7, 1954. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed February 19, 2010.

Inasmuch as some proponents of *Brown* attempt to separate desegregation and white hostility, this ideal became increasingly hard to believe because the more black youth attempted to enter white schools, the more hostility they experienced. For example, the nine black students who integrated Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas are often used as the quintessential example for school integration, which was seen a progress. However, when a number of them recalled their experiences at Central, the unique relationship shared by integration and white opposition is illustrated. For example, Minnijean Brown stated that her experiences at Central were not so pleasant because "[whites at Central assumed that we were] one dimensional, that we had no intellectual life, that we had no creative life, that we had no capability for any of that." Later in the interview, Brown discussed how Central never tried to cultivate them as human beings. She stated, "They didn't ask me at Central what I wanted to be, who I was, how you are, do you have a mind, what have you read. The assumption was I'd read nothing, that I really should be scrubbing the floors with a toothbrush."[19]

Incidents that received national attention, such as Little Rock, and lesser known events, such as Norfolk, Virginia, illustrate how hope for integration and opposition to integration varied but one rarely voided the other. The nine black students who entered Central High School in Little Rock in 1957 and those seventeen who attempted to desegregate three previously all white schools in Norfolk in 1959 all believed in integration. However, the opposition they faced was quite different. Unlike the hostility

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[19] Elizabeth Jacoway, "Not Anger but Sorrow: Minnijean Brown Trickey Remembers the Little Rock Crisis," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* (2005): 4–5, http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=da481a0c-d900-4890-9f2f-6f86e4ab911f%40sessionmgr13&vid=4&hid=8; Vincent Willis, "'Let Me in, I Have the Right to Be Here:' Black Youth Struggle for Equal Education and Full Citizenship After the Brown Decision, 1954-1969," *Citizenship Teaching & Learning* (Forthcoming 2013).

experienced by the nine black students in Little Rock, students in Norfolk, according to the *Daily Defender*, expected "the orderly reopening completed as smoothly and as quickly as possible so that we may proceed with our immediate objective to obtain an education." The article went on to state, "The Negro students were expected to come to the schools individually and without escorts," which is drastically different from the Little Rock Nine who had the National Guard escort them to Central.[20] Although the newspaper article does not actually discuss how Norfolk's desegregation plan was executed, it does suggest that black students attempting to desegregate faced parallel circumstances.

As Norfolk administrators attempted to execute the desegregation plan, they took precautionary measures similar to those taken in Washington, D.C. The *Daily Defender* reported that "fifty policemen were assigned to the school area. Floodlights, set a week ago, have illuminated the school grounds every night to guard against arson or bombing attempts." The newspaper article also reported that "Arlington segregationists, Jack Rathbone said the defenders of state Sovereignty and Individual Liberties . . . would picket at the school" to show his opposition to desegregation.[21] Although the black students who attempted to enter previously white schools in Norfolk were not punched, like those in Baltimore or treated with such venom as the Little Rock Nine, they did experience opposition. The fact that black students in Norfolk asked for an "orderly reopening" implies that they experienced school closure just like several black children in the South did when whites refused to obey the law. Notwithstanding the fact that attempts were made to accomplish desegregation and suppress white hostility, several newspapers

[20] *Daily Defender, "*Students Ask Orderly Mixing; 3 Va. Cities Set for Integration," col. 1, pg. 1, February 2, 1959. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed March 2, 2010.
[21] Ibid.

showed white hostility that was constant and their hostility gravely influenced the educational experiences of black students.[22] Regardless of the preventative measures taken in Norfolk, when examined in conjunction with incidents in Baltimore, Washington, Clinton, and Little Rock, we see black students who integrated white schools faced opposition from white adults and white students.

Notwithstanding the initial hostility after *Brown*, a number of blacks, including black youth, remained hopeful that the case would bring about real change. Moreover, black students' willingness to enter into public white primary and secondary schools and public colleges and universities brought them national acclaim from the most prominent civil rights organization of the 1950s, the NAACP. According to the *Atlanta Daily World* and the *New York Amsterdam News*, a rally, sponsored by the NAACP, was held to honor the youth who had participated in the fight for civil rights. The event was held in New York and the newspapers reported that between twelve hundred and two thousand youth were in attendance. The NAACP labeled the youth "freedom fighters" and honored them for their bravery and drive to see "all move forward together toward our supreme democratic goal of assuring equal rights, even-handed justice, and equal opportunities for all our people."[23] The freedom fighters honored at the rally were Bobby

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[22] Article published in the *Daily Defender* portrayed how the responses of white students living in Colp, Illinois were parallel to the white students living in Baltimore, Washington, and Little Rock towards integration. See "White Pupils Boycott New Integrated Schools," pg. 4 col. 4. August 28, 1957. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed April 3, 2010.

[23] I was not able to find any other newspaper coverage on the NAACP sponsoring a rally to recognize the sacrifices of "young freedom fighters," which suggest that this rally was not an annual event. Also, there was no report on the youth marching for integrated schools after 1959, which implies that the marches did not continue or the number of participants had decreased so dramatically that newspapers decided not to cover the event. The later is unlikely, especially for black newspapers, because integration/desegregation was such an important topic during this time period. The inability to continue the Youth March for Integrated Schools substantiates the claim that there was an ideological shift with some in the black community about *Brown* in the 1960s. See Henry Allen Bullock. *A History of Negro Education in the South: From 1619 to the Present*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

Cain, Jolee Fritz, Fred Moore, Earnest McEwen, and Gloria Lockerman. At the event, Bobby Cain, who was one of the black students who integrated Clinton High School, stated that "only through personal sacrifices on the part of young people will desegregation become a reality."[24]

The NAACP celebrated black youth because they, like the organization, believed that segregation was the antithesis of democracy and decided to fight against it. The celebration also stemmed from the organization's admiration for black students' ability to persevere despite constant aggression. Ellen Levine posits that black students were celebrated during this period when she stated, "Black children's fight for equality was not driven by self-gratification. They were uncluttered by concerns of power and fame, they had the simplest and clearest of political urges, the impulses for freedom."[25] As the 1950s drew to a close, black students continued to illustrate their hope in integration while whites ignored or attempted to undermine *Brown*.

Black youth support for integration was not based exclusively on entering into white schools. Archival data, such as organizational correspondence and meeting minutes, portray how black youth participated in a number of events that reinforced their support for *Brown*, one being the four year anniversary celebration of the historical case. A memorandum from Herbert L. Wright reveals the "NAACP youth and college units throughout the country are making plans to sponsor programs on May 17th in the celebration of the anniversary of the Supreme Court's decision."[26] The memo goes on to

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[24] *Atlanta Daily World*, "Youth Tell of Fight For Freedom in South," col. 7, pg. 2, June 04, 1957; *New York Amsterdam News*, "Mass Youth Rally May 26 To Honor 'Freedom Fighters,'" col. 1, pg. 2, May 25, 1957. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed January 19, 2010.

[25] Levine, *Freedom's Children*, xi-xii.

[26] Prior to this event, the NAACP had a campaign meeting on April 17th to discuss several projects the organization wanted to host. One of the projects was a National Youth Conference on Desegregation. The

disclose the groups involved and the dates of programs, which implies that this was a nationwide event that took place on university and college campuses like Shaw University and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) as well as at high schools in Greensboro, North Carolina and Paterson, New Jersey. Another illustration of the hope that existed after *Brown* and youth support of desegregation was the national event, "Youth March for Integrated Schools."[27] Very few scholars have elevated this event to a level of historical significance but the NAACP Youth file papers, Bayard Rustin papers, and A. Philip Randolph papers illustrate how relevant the event was to the struggle for educational equality.[28]

Before hundreds of thousands marched to the nation's capital in support of civil rights in 1963, tens of thousands marched in support of integration in 1958 and 1959.

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purpose of the conference was "to stimulate and inform outstanding teen-age youth leaders and win the influence and active support for our Civil Rights program. To advise National Office on what youth wants and needs in order to effectively participate in the campaign to end segregation. To find out what youth are doing and what they feel they can do to help advance our Civil Rights objectives." National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *NAACP Youth File. General Department File. Form Letters, 1956-1957, 1960-1965*, Papers of the NAACP. Part 19, Youth File. Series D, 1956-1965, Youth Department Files ;; Reel 10, Fr. 0255-0567; Variation: Papers of the NAACP.; Part 19,; Youth File. Series D,; 1956-1965, Youth Department Files ;; Reel 10, Fr. 0255-0567. (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1998), sec. 2:001.

[27] Although the NAACP Youth Council participated in the event, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was the organization that spearheaded the event. Roy Wilkins did not participate in the first Youth March for Integrated Schools event because it did not follow the typical procedural guidelines of the NAACP. He believed in the purpose and mission of the event but just felt that A. Philip Randolph did not have enough time to plan an effective march. In fairness to Roy Wilkins, the event was hurriedly planned and he was told about the event only weeks before the march was to take place. Although the NAACP helped sponsor the 1958 march, they played a more pivotal role in the 1959 march. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *NAACP Youth File. General Department File. Career Conference, 1956-1961*, Papers of the NAACP. Part 19, Youth File. Series D, 1956-1965, Youth Department Files ;; Reel 07, Fr. 0420-0785; Variation: Papers of the NAACP.; Part 19,; Youth File. Series D,; 1956-1965, Youth Department Files ;; Reel 07, Fr. 0420-0785. (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1998).

[28] Some scholars have elevated the importance of this event in their work. See Andrew Edmund Kersten, *A. Philip Randolph: A Life in the Vanguard*, The African American History Series (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007); Paula F Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990); Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen: A Biography*, 1st ed (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997); Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 1999).

Primarily organized by A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin, the purpose of the event was to show that solidarity existed between young and old, black and white, and different civil rights organizations. In addition to showing solidarity, the march was to demonstrate that people of different races could come together and learn from each other. The memorandum sent by A. Philip Randolph articulated why he believed the event was necessary. He stated, "It is my belief that young people are anxious for a way to affirm their wish to live, study and play together without regard to racial distinctions. . . I conclude by expressing my firm conviction that in this crisis in our national affairs, no cause demands more and requires the thought and the clear leadership of our great national youth organization than that of integration of ours schools."[29]

Like Randolph, Rustin also believed that public schools were in a crisis due to segregation. Jervis Anderson, Rustin's biographer, noted that Rustin believed that "segregation is a basic injustice. Since [Rustin] believe it to be so, [he] must attempt to remove it. There are three ways in which one can deal with an injustice.(a) One can accept it without protest. (b) One can seek to avoid it. (c) One can resist the injustice nonviolently . . . To resist by intelligent means and with an attitude of mutual responsibility and respect, is much the better choice."[30] Rustin's choice about how to deal with segregation permeated throughout the Youth March for Integrated Schools event. As a career organizer, Rustin also believed that youth had a pivotal role to play in

[29] When Randolph was asked about why the march must happen now he responds by stating, "While the courts are handing down favorable decisions on the desegregation and integration of public schools, we must remember that the South is not accepting these decisions and is waging a nationwide campaign for their evasion and nullification. Moreover, the courts can change their position on the question. They have changed before and they can change again. It was the Supreme Court which handed down the decision involving the case *Plessy vs. Ferguson* . . . But today it has handed down the decision reversing its position on this question." Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*, rell 27.
[30] Anderson, *Bayard Rustin*, 101.

the struggle for educational equality. In a speech reflecting back on the event he wrote, "in many respect an expression from them [youth] is more meaningful than from the generations, like myself, decades removed from the schools."[31] A delegation from the Youth March for Integrated Schools was also organized to meet with President Eisenhower at the inaugural event.[32] Out of the eleven delegates, six were black youth—Minnie Jean Brown, Paula Martin, Norman Brailey, Leon Thompson, Offie Wortham, and Fred Moore—which is not a surprise considering Rustin was co-coordinator of the event.

While Rustin took responsibility for handling the logistical components of the march, it was A. Philip Randolph who took charge in controlling the message. A letter sent from Randolph stated, "an organized, interracial, march . . . will be centered primarily around youth of high school and college age. In planning our program, we have had the support and active participation of religious groups of every faith, labor unions, and civic organizations."[33] Randolph promoting the march as multi-religious and multiracial was probably more of a rebuttal to those who attempted to tarnish the

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[31] Rustin and University, *The Bayard Rustin Papers*.

[32] Although the delegation did not meet with President Eisenhower, they did leave some recommendations with his staff that I believe relates to this study. One of the recommendations made by the delegation that reinforces their support of *Brown was*: "The Chief Executive should place his weight behind the passage of a truly effective Civil Rights Bill in the present session of Congress. As far as school integration is concerned, we believe that the Douglas-Javits-Celler Bill is by far the most far-sighted and constructive piece of legislation before Congress . . . The Douglas-Javits-Cellar Bill is an historic and statesmanlike proposal. It empowers the Federal Government to move into the center of the school picture and to undertake, on a nationwide basis, careful and constructive planning of the nation's march toward integration." Another suggestion made by to delegation to President Eisenhower was "to call a White House Conference of Youth and student leaders, chosen from national and regional organizations, both North and South, to discuss ways in which youth may participate in the implementation of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*.

[33] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *NAACP Administrative File. General Office File. Youth March on Washington, 1958-September 1959*, Papers of the NAACP. Part 24, Special Subjects, 1956-1965. Series C: Life memberships--Zangrando ;; Reel 41, Fr. 0448-0682; Variation: Papers of the NAACP.; Part 24,; Special Subjects, 1956-1965. Series C: Life memberships--Zangrando ;; Reel 41, Fr. 0448-0682. (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1997).

purpose of the event by stating it was being organized by communists. Although sensitive to those kinds of critiques, he continued to focus on the purpose and the mission. He stated, "the Organizing Committee has assured that on the day of our demonstration the outpouring of citizens will be such as to make a deep and effective impression upon President Eisenhower and other government officials. We believe that his is one event that can contribute to the mobilization of public opinions in enforcing the school desegregation decisions."[34]

On the 25th of October 1958, Youth March for Integrated Schools took place in Washington, D.C. Based on newspaper accounts, the march was considered a success drawing nearly 10,000 people. Letters from the NAACP, Rustin, and Randolph files suggest that they were satisfied with the turnout but even more ecstatic about the responses from those in attendance as well as the demand to have another march the following year. Randolph received letters from students and parents stating how they enjoyed the march and the usefulness of the event. A group of students from Brooklyn College who were surveyed about the event stated,

> This is the first time in over a decade that college students have been able to raise themselves above the stifling atmosphere of conformity and the tragic indifference to vital issues so prevalent in the academic world and to demonstrate for so great a moral cause. . . Your leadership has been a source of real inspiration to us . . . We pledge to come back to Washington again and again. . . We must be firm and resolute in bringing to the attention of our national leaders the conviction of American young people that immediate steps must be taken to assure safe and speedy integration of your school system.[35]

A similar letter by a parent was sent to Randolph expressing how pleased she was with the march. Mrs. Olivia Frost wrote, "My daughter and I were greatly inspired by the

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[34] Ibid.

[35] Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*, l. reel 27.

entire program. It was thrilling to see the youth from so many different parts of the country. It should have proven to all that the youth are sincere and deserve to have their views received and considered by the White House Administration."[36] Although letters received were an affirmation of the event, it was the achievements and the resolutions that made the second march possible. An interim report that covered the march in 1958 elevated four achievements,

> First, it dramatized the nation-wide support among young people for the Negro and white students in the South who are bearing the brunt of the fight for integrated schools: Second, students and young people in general were awakened and mobilized to active participation in the movement for racial equality: Third, individuals and organizations worked together in harmony to make the March the tremendous success it was: Finally, a solid foundation was laid for the Petition Campaign and Youth March on a vastly expanded basis in the spring of 1959.[37]

The report goes on to discuss how those who attended the march felt they had a responsibility to spread the word in their communities to get more young people involved. In addition to making more people aware of the march, they also pledged to remain dedicated to the mission and purpose that spurred the event.

Nearly 10,000 youth left Washington, D.C. pledging to fight for "full equality in our schools, equal opportunities in our chosen careers, and equal treatment in society at large. We shall come back to Washington again and again to consult the leaders of our nation, to petition Congress, to press for the laws which will guide and sanction our

[36] Randolph's letter to Mrs. Frost reveals that she was not the only parent who felt this way. He stated, "Thank you for your kind letter . . . expressing your appreciation. I think your letter was very splendid in indicating the value of democratic participation in mass demonstration . . . I have received many encouraging letters indicating the tremendous value of the experience to the youth through participation in the March." Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*.

[37] Ibid., pt. reel 27.

advancement to a fuller, more interracial democracy."[38] With the enthusiasm and commitment displayed by youth at the initial march, Randolph and Rustin wanted the next event to be bigger and better. So they began organizing the event aware of the logistical errors that occurred for the first march and were determined not to have those mishaps happen again.

Most of the youth who participated in the "The Youth March for Integrated Schools" in 1958 lived in the northeastern region of the country, particularly New York. The regionalism could be explained by two primary factors: 1) the time organizers had to distribute information and 2) the fact that Dr. King was stabbed weeks before the event. Although Randolph and Rustin felt like the march in 1958 was a success, they knew that some changes needed to be made in the organizational strategies. According to Paula Pferrer, the primary adjustment made was to start organizing for the event earlier. Not even a month after the first march "Randolph called a meeting of one hundred leaders at his office to plan a 'continuing civil rights youth program. After formal dissolution of the *ad hoc* committee that sponsored the first youth march, a new committee was formed to conduct the Youth March and Petition Campaign in 1959."[39] In addition to starting the planning for the march earlier by creating a committee, Randolph solicited support from the NAACP which offered more than their sponsorship for this event. For the second march, the NAACP offered "their experience, organizational and financial support."[40] The shift in organizational strategies and the assistance from more organizations benefited the second march tremendously.

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[38] Ibid., v. reel 27.
[39] Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement*, 182.
[40] Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*, reel 27.

On April 18th 1959 over 26,000 youth, from all over the country, participated in the Youth March for Integrated Schools, which was an even bigger success than the organizers had hoped. After some jubilant opening remarks to start off the event, A. Philip Randolph stated,

> We have come again to Washington because the job of achieving integrated schools and civil rights legislation is not yet finished, although some progress had been made...Youth and their allies have come back to Washington because, in this fleeting moment of history, the problem of integrated school has become the conscience of the nation. We have returned to our Nation's Capital today with a democratic participation in a great mass demonstration by youth and adults to indicate the uncompromising commitment . . . to secure education in the public schools free from the insult of discrimination or segregation.[41]

Randolph's opening comments suggest that a number of states were still out of compliance with the Supreme Court's decision and the range of emotions following the case was still prevalent. Although the organizers of the march were excited about the increase in youth participation, the increase may have said more about the lack of progress occurring throughout the country, particularly in the South. Whereas Randolph's remarks at the event give credence to the limited educational progress occurring and more to the regress and doubts surrounding *Brown*, Dr. King and Roy Wilkins' comments were definitely embedded in hope.

At the second "Youth March for Integrated Schools," Dr. King declared that the generation going to school after the *Brown* ruling would benefit greatly from integration. As he looked out into the crowd of black and white marchers, he said, "I see only one

[41]Randolph connects the injustices taking place in America to injustices taking place in other parts of the world. He wrote, "When Faubus of Little Rock is encouraged and supported in this flagrant attack upon little Negro children[s]' right to attend integrated schools in Little Rock, aid, comfort and support are being given to the horrors committed by the Russian communists in Hungary against the people of Hungary and the tragedy visited upon the people of Tibet by Chinese communist barbarianism. Because liberty is indivisible, one cannot support colonialism in Africa and racism in the United States without strengthening the hands of communism in its march for world-wide conquest." Ibid., pt. reel 27.

face, the face of the future." He continued by saying, "I cannot help thinking, that a hundred years from now, the historians will be calling this not the beat generation, but the generation of integration."[42] Dr. King's talk is definitely more celebratory than Randolph. Dr. King goes on to state,

> The fact that thousands of you came here to Washington and that thousands more signed your petition, proves that this generation will not take no for an answer . . . Nothing like this has ever happened in the history of our nation, except the last Youth March . . . young people through your own experience, have somehow discovered the central fact of American life—that is the extension of democracy for all Americans depends upon complete integration of Negro Americans.[43]

Although Dr. King's speech had a hopeful tone he did indict America for disenfranchising black people from the ballot box. Given that political empowerment would became a primary focus to many black leaders in the early sixties, it is not hard to understand why Dr. King gave a political speech to a crowd of youth who were not eligible to vote. Being a forward thinking leader, he may have really believed that equal education was drawing near and the focus should shift to political empowerment. Regardless of the political undertone in Dr. King's speech, the belief that the generation he was speaking to would have a different educational experience permeated throughout the crowd.

The *Los Angeles Tribune* expressed how Wilkins and Dr. King thought the march would bring about real educational change.[44] Wilkins stated that knowledge of each other would come from integration and that "respect and dedication to the ideal of

[42] *Los Angeles Tribune*, "Integration will bring 'Knowledge of each other,' Wilkins says as 26,000 Youth March," volume 19, issue 11, pg. 7.
[43] Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*, reel 27.
[44] *Los Angeles Tribune*, "Integration will bring 'Knowledge of each other,' Wilkins says as 26,000 Youth March," volume 19, issue 11, pg. 7. April 24, 1959. http://docs.newsbank.com/s/HistArchive/ahnpdoc/EANX/12C5FDF30E97FA28/0D0CB4F3D1A01B2A. Accessed on February 13, 2010.

liberty and equality" would come as well. According to Wilkins, integration was more than people of different races occupying the same space. It was also about upholding the traditions of freedom by learning and respecting each other. Dr. King agreed with Wilkins but he saw integration doing much more than providing knowledge and respect. He believed that the principles of democracy could only be fulfilled through integration.

Leaders like Randolph, Rustin, Dr. King, Wilkins, and others were encouraged by both marches because it showed that people of different backgrounds and races could coexist. If thousands of people came to the nation's capital to march for integrated schools then it was reasonable to think that school integration was the next step. Black leaders concluded that this event was significant because it illustrated the possibility and the benefits of integration.

Black leaders were not the only ones who deemed the events an accomplishment. Youth organizers, according to the *New York Amsterdam News*, viewed the event also as a success. A youth quoted in the paper stated, "I believe that this day will be remembered as one of the most glorious in Negro history." Another youth is quoted stating that "this youth march for integrated schools is significant because it shows how willing we are to fight for what is rightfully ours."[45] Both of these quotes give insight to how the youth, specifically black youth, believed that integration would change their educational experiences. Even though the youth critiqued President Eisenhower for not attending either march, they were able to get a statement from him which stated "that his

[45] Lloyd Weaver, "A Teen Viewpoint," *New York Amsterdam News*, col. 1, pg. 34, November 8, 1958. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed August 18, 2010.

administration would not be satisfied until racial discrimination [in any sector] was eradicated in America."[46]

While the data do not suggest students demanded another march or made another youth pledge, the events may still be interpreted as successful because some victories did occur. For example, the petition campaign was touted as a success because it was circulated nationwide and was able to garner 250,000 signatures, which were presented to the White House "urging 'an executive and legislative program to speed integration.'"[47] Second, despite the fact that the participants of the event were not able to meet with the president directly, delegates from the Youth March for Integrated Schools were able to have a meeting with President Eisenhower's aide—Gerald D. Morgan—to discuss their grievances. Finally, after the meeting with Morgan, Eisenhower United States issued a statement admitting that the pace in which public schools were being integrated was unacceptable. An admission from the highest office in the land was tremendous because the president, in essence, agreed with the primary goal of the event. Even though President Eisenhower did not create any policies after the event to aid in the youth's cause, his statement was a victory for them.

Both federally and locally, however, officials were notorious for ignoring *Brown* and moving slowly on a host of issues that would improve the education of black youth. For example, nearly 3, 000 black students in Snow Hill, North Carolina decided to protest against "their [inadequate] facilities. Their primary concern was that their school was without a gymnasium and that the auditorium was too small. According to the *Chicago Defender* "Black student's main grievance[s] were overcrowdedness and

[46] *Los Angeles Tribune*, "Integration will bring 'Knowledge of each other," pg. 7.
[47] Randolph, *The Papers of A. Philip Randolph [microform] / Introduction by August Meier and John Bracey*, reel 27.

inferior equipment." [48] What made the matter worse for the students was that a white school in the same county was getting a newly built school costing $450,000.00. Because a number of whites saw blacks as second-class citizens, what black youth experienced in Snow Hill was not an anomaly. The lumbering pace in which any form of improvements occurred reiterated the racial beliefs that permeated throughout the federal and local level, and black youth could not escape the educational consequences of these thoughts, regardless of the rhetoric of *Brown*.

For students who attended the national event, getting politicians to admit that the implementation of *Brown* was not going as smoothly as initially intended was something totally different than federal politicians having the fortitude to force local leaders to implement the decision with "all deliberate speed."[49] The fact that they had to march for two years just to get the president to admit the pace in which integration was occurring was unacceptable proved officials, federal or local, had little intention of implementing the court's decision on their own. This was a case where students marched for integration on the national level or fought for better conditions on a local level.

In essence, black youth wanted officials to act in a way that fundamentally changed the educational system which proved to be an arduous task. Regardless of where the event occurred—a national march or a local protest, students realized that the majority of political officials were not willing to implement any policies that could be misconstrued as an attack on the status quo. This created a very difficult terrain to navigate because if officials refused to integrate or fund black schools equally, then the

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[48] *Daily Defender*, "Pupils Boycott 6 Jim Crow Schools," col. 4, pg. A21, February 11, 1959. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed March 2, 2010; *Atlanta Daily World*, "School Officials to Discipline High School Student 'Marchers'," col. 1, pg. 1.

[49] Daugherity and Bolton, *With All Deliberate Speed*.

fundamental changes black youth sought were in doubt. Consequently, they would have to maneuver through a quadripartite system that often yielded different results but rarely led to full citizenship and educational equality without great sacrifice and perseverance on their behalf.

**Parallel Citizenship or Something Else**

Regardless of the fierce opposition to *Brown*, the fact is public schools, particularly in the South, were less segregated in the decade following the decision than the decades that preceded it. In a sense, the *Atlanta Daily World*, which was often critiqued for being too conservative, was right about the landmark case working because more black youth were attending white schools previously denied to them. In addition to them gaining access to a number of previously segregated schools, a number of black schools began to receive more monetary support. If the educational experiences of black youth were measured quantitatively during the late 1950s and early 1960s, it would appear that full citizenship was obtainable. Those who believed that some measure of success had taken place in a region that pledged its allegiance to Jim Crow could point to two simple facts: 1) black students, although a selected few, had access to white schools; 2) blacks schools were being well funded and in some cases received more funding than white schools.

Progress was not as slow after *Brown*, particularly when it came to public education. John J. Donahue's article noted "Progress was substantial enough that in some cases by 1950, and in all cases by 1960, the white and black school systems in

Georgia had become virtually identical according to the depicted empirical measures."[50] The problem with trying to quantify the educational experiences of black students using these metrics is that these variables are outliers. Although it is true that more black youth were attending schools previously denied to them, a large majority of them remained at black schools that were largely underfunded after *Brown*.[51] Also, the increase in monetary support was not a result of local officials trying to right the wrongs of slavery and Jim Crow but used as a means to circumvent *Brown*, which yielded some measured progress but a host of regress as well.

Although black educators and black leaders understood what undergirded these improvements were racist beliefs by local white officials, they realized the silver lining. Just as Richard Allen—founder of the American Methodist Episcopal Church—had done during slavery and black educators had done during legalized segregation, local black leaders used whites' refusal to accept them as full citizens as a means to improve their institutions. As Marcia Synnott stated, "A number of black leaders were willing to postpone demands for integration, in exchange for immediate improvements in their schools." She also noted that $1 million more dollars were poured into black schools than white schools over a five year period."[52] While Synnott's work elevates the increase in funding a number of black schools received in South Carolina, other scholars have found similar trends throughout the South.[53] Even though a number of black students and black

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[50] John J. Donohue, James J. Heckman, and Petra E. Todd, "The Schooling of Southern Blacks: The Roles of Legal Activism and Private Philanthropy, 1910–1960," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 117, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 233, doi:10.1162/003355302753399490.

[51] Gary Orfield, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown V. Board of Education* (New Press, 1996); Walker, *Their Highest Potential*.

[52] Marcia Synnott, "Desegregation  in South Carolina, 1950-1963: Sometime "Between 'Now and "Never""'," in *Looking South: Chapters in the Story of An American Region*, Jon L. Wakelyn (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1989), 52–59.

[53] Walker, *Their Highest Potential*; Donohue, Heckman, and Todd, "The Schooling of Southern Blacks."

schools benefited from the strategy employed by local whites to prevent desegregation, most blacks were affected negatively by this strategy because the funds that went into improving black schools during this period did not reach the masses.

Blacks had experienced the paradoxes of progress and regress for so long the contradictory message of increased funding for black schools was not foreign. Blacks throughout the South realized that more money was being funneled to black schools not as an affirmation of their citizenship but as a reinforcement of something else. Local whites did not want black students having access to white schools, and they were willing to pay a hefty price to keep them away. Coincidence did not create state of the art black schools that were built in 1950s and early 1960s. Those that were not state of the art received a number of structural improvements such as auditoriums, gymnasiums, and science labs. As a result, some black youth were able to obtain an education with first-rate resources without ever having to attend a previously white school.

Nonetheless, lack of southern money and will maintained a gulf in funding between black and white pupils well into the 1960s. Even with the passage of *Brown* and the increased funding for black schools, Synnott concluded, "structural racism in politics, economics, and social relations persists," which had profound consequences on black education.[54] Throughout the South, local leaders remained rigid in their belief that blacks were not full citizens so they did not have to provide the same opportunities afforded to whites. Because of these long standing ideologies and the capacity to reinforce them through policies, a number of black students continued to attend schools where conditions were hazardous and resources scarce. The consequences of local officials' dogmatic refusal to make substantive improvements to education for the majority of

[54] Synnott, "Desegregation in South Carolina, 1950-1963: Sometime "Between 'Now and "Never""'," 61.

black youth meant that their educational experiences often mirrored what the historic case was supposed to fix.

### A Different Tone

The attitudes of southern whites remained constant throughout the 1950s and 1960s but the tone of black youth changed considerably. Once youth activism became more localized and occurred more frequently, it significantly shaped the movement, particularly as it related to educational equality.[55] Prior to the 1960s, youth activism was largely orchestrated by national organizations like the NAACP, which meant the primary goal reflected the organization's agenda. However, when the movement became more localized the goals became less about the goals pushed by an organization and more about the issues important to the local community.  Local issues varied state to state so a pragmatic approach proved pivotal to improving local conditions. In addition to focusing on local issues, black youth displayed their frustration in a different manner. Their tactics were more confrontation and their language was more direct. The shift in tone proved Marshall's hesitancy to accept the ruling as the end to the struggle was correct.

No other southern state proved *Brown* the beginning of the fight more than Georgia. Although other southern states may have received more media coverage, Georgians' opposition to the case coupled with black student activism along with the state's influential standing in the region provides countless examples of how the

[55] For more information about how the Civil Rights Movement became a combination of localize movements taking place throughout the South read: Charles M Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1996); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004); Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (University of Georgia Press, 2003).

implementation of *Brown* was slow to take shape.[56] A report by the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action published in 1960 stated that "students [in Georgia] attending Negro Schools have been known to attend classes for weeks without being able to secure the textbooks required for the courses; meanwhile, the practice continues of supplying Negro students with used or out-dated texts disordered by white students." The report went on to note that white institutions received $31,632,057.18 of the educational and general expenditure of Georgia whereas black institutions received $2,001,127.06.[57] The expenditure gap in Georgia also included employment, housing, and health. With all of these disparities rampant in a southern state that portrayed itself as forward thinking, it is no wonder why the *Brown* decision had such a difficult time being implemented.

Black youth knew the educational injustices they experienced were based on local whites' refusal to accept them as equal citizens. Ignoring the full citizenship of blacks and implementing policies that reinforced those ideals was a common trait in the South. An article published by the *Pittsburgh Courier* entitled, "Southern School Desegregation Bogged Down in 'Tokenism," portrayed the age old custom. The article stated "the plain fact is what the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 and what Negroes have strived through the courts to get since 1938 just ain't happening." In answering the question of why desegregation was taking so long to be implemented, the article simply stated that "local school boards have been able to adopt 'desegregation' plans which cut numerical

[56] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*; Alton Hornsby, "Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954-1973: From Segregation to Segregation," *The Journal of Negro History* 76, no. 1/4 (January 1, 1991): 21–47; Coleman, Kenneth, *A History of Georgia*, 2nd ed. (University of Georgia Press, 1991); Christopher Meyers, ed., *The Empire State of the South: Georgia History in Documents and Essays* (Mercer University Press, 2008); Winston A Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Duke University Press, 2006); Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*; Susan Margaret McGrath, *Great Expectations: The History of School Desegregation in Atlanta and Boston, 1954-1990*, 1992.
[57] Albert Paul Brinson, "A Second Look: The Negro Citizen in Atlanta" (The Atlanta Student Movement Collection, January 1960), Robert W. Woodruff Library (Atlanta University Center).

integration to the barest minimum the courts will accept."[58] Southern states' constant attempt to circumvent any substantial educational improvements caused a number of black students to be frustrated because they understood that these inequalities went beyond not recognizing one's intellectual ability. A denial of one's citizenship is in essence a denial of their humanity. So in essence, a number of whites opposed *Brown* because, to an extent, the case recognized blacks as citizens. Therefore, by the beginning of the 1960s, state officials would see similar educational demands made by youth in the 1950s but demands would be more confrontational and direct, particularly in Georgia. Those in power would finally realize that anything other than full citizenship was unacceptable by black youth attending school in the 1960s.

The failure of public officials to embrace and implement *Brown* was not the primary concern amongst young black Georgians. The source of their frustration stemmed from white Georgians unwillingness to distribute resources evenly. Black youth believed that they could navigate whites' refusal to accept integration because a number of them were not keen on integration. Nevertheless, the resource disparities caused great concern because that meant they were going without while their white counterparts had an abundance of resources. Public officials refusing the landmark decision was one thing but perpetuating a system that made it impossible for black students to compete academically in a racially and economically progressive state was something different and unacceptable. The frustration this caused amongst black youth can be seen in a number of youth–led events that surfaced during this period.

[58] *Pittsburgh Courier*, "Southern School Desegregation Bogged Down in 'Tokenism'," col. 1, pg. p. A2, March 3, 1962. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed March 2, 2010.

One of the first examples that portrayed the frustration felt by young black Georgians during this time was indicated in a manifesto entitled "An Appeal for Human Rights." The manifesto was written by students from the Atlanta University Center (AUC) and published in the *Atlanta Daily World* on March 10, 1960. The manifesto stated, "Among the inequities and injustices in Atlanta and in Georgia against which we protest, the following are examples: 1) Education, 2) Jobs, 3) Housing, 4) Voting, 5) Hospitals, 6) Movies, Concerts, and Restaurants, 7) Law Enforcement." The manifesto received so much statewide and local attention, according to the article, "[the appeal] served as an awakening and a challenge to Atlanta and the South as to the mammoth torment of minority youth over inequities and denials which confront them in everyday life. In publicizing deficiencies Negro youth faced in education, jobs, housing, voting . . . served to enlighten a large majority of our population as to the inadequacies of opportunity and proved a platform for remedial action."[59]

Even though student led events took place prior to the manifesto, it was the appeal that captured the frustration of black students in Georgia and their need to respond. Winston Grady-Willis argued that the manifesto and the subsequent rise of student activism "signaled to the world that a fundamental concern of the Black freedom struggle was in securing human rights, and that principal among them was the right of self-determination."[60]Even though the manifesto was authored by six students—Willie Mays, James Felder, Marion D. Bennett, Don Clarke, Mary Ann Smith, and Roslyn Pope—it spoke to the frustration black students who were in primary and secondary schools had to

[59]*Atlanta Daily World*, "College Students Issue Their Manifesto," col. 1, pg. 4, March 10, 1960. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed March 2, 2010.
[60] Winston Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006) xv.

be feeling because the majority of black students, rather in college or in primary and secondary schools, were exposed to educational disparities.

Numerous examples show the disparities between the promise of *Brown* and the educational realities black youth experienced in Georgia. For example, in Leesburg, Georgia, Charles Wingfield "was suspended for demanding his school have new and better equipment." The *Cleveland Call* and *Post* was more specific than the *Atlanta Daily World* in that it disclosed Wingfield's demand. The article stated, "he asked for better school, library, and gymnasium."[61] According to the *Daily Defender*, the student wanted better school conditions. The newspapers stated, "the student pointed out to NAACP officials that their building houses approximately 1,200 students from grades 1 through 12."[62] The poor conditions black students faced nearly a decade after *Brown* spurred responses throughout Georgia. Another example that illuminates the frustration young black Georgians felt took place in Atlanta. Students at Washington High School disliked their "inadequate school conditions and decided to march to city hall," according to the *Atlanta Daily World*.[63] The *Daily Defender* summed up the frustration black youth often felt about their educational experiences this way. "The high school student declared,

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[61] *Cleveland Call and Post*, "Ga. Pupil Asks for Better School Equipment; Expelled," col. 1, pg. 5B, January 27, 1962; *Atlanta Daily World*, "County High School Closed After Protest," col. 5, pg. 2, January 18, 1962. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed August 15, 2010.

[62] *Daily Defender*, "Rural Ga. Area Pupils Walk Out for Better School," col. 2, pg. 8, October 23, 1962; The *Atlanta Daily World* also covered this story. Black schools in the South were not the only black schools in the country that dealt with poor conditions and overcrowding. Several articles gives example of the overcrowding that took place in Chicago and Milwaukee and how black student's responded read, *Chicago Defender*, "Big Boycott Drummed up by Students," col. 3, pg.1, December 3, 1966; *Daily Defender*, "2,500 Students Stay Out in May-Spencer Boycott," col. 3, pg. 2, February 15, 1968; *Daily Defender*, "Students Plan City School's Boycott," col. 1, pg. 9, February 26, 1968; http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed January 5, 2010.

[63] *Atlanta Daily World,* "High School Students March to City Hall; Officials Set Probe," col. 1, pg. 1, January 8, 1964; "Efforts Being Made To Keep High Schoolers in Classes," col. 1, pg. 1, January 9, 1964. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed March 2, 2010. *New York Times*, "Florida Schools Boycotted," pg. 31, October 25, 1966; ProQuest Historical Newspapers. Accessed February 19, 2010.

'we're sick of the situation at this raggedy old school . . . Our library is good, but the text books are mostly second hand. The building itself is horrible.'"[64] Their concern with poor school conditions points to an important portrait of the extent to which black students understood the injustices that many of them were exposed to on a regular basis.

In addition to poor conditions, black youth had to deal with a number of their progressive teachers and principals being dismissed by white school officials, which was a common injustice that predated *Brown* but was still taking place in the 1960s. The *Atlanta Daily World* reported Al Cheatham, the principal of Sol. C. Johnson High school, was "fired by the Chatham County board of education, for being too progressive."[65] The *Atlanta Daily World* covered this story for several days and all of the articles discussed how Mr. Cheatham was well educated—held a masters degree from Harvard—and the students of Sol. C. Johnson really liked him. The articles implied that the principal was fired because he was "active in a Savannah group called the Crusade for Voters which encourages Negroes to register and vote and supported candidates it felt help Negroes the most."[66] Firing qualified and progressive black principals, unfortunately, was a standardized approach by educational board members who felt that blacks should be satisfied with any form of education.

Black youth had to deal with a range of issues that called for multiple responses. The Appeal for Human Rights was one response. The protest in Leesburg and Savannah was another response. However, one of the most enduring responses that occurred in

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[64] *Daily Defender*, "Improve Crane High, Students Demand," col. 2, pg. 5, September 13, 1965. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed February 19, 2010.
[65] *Atlanta Daily World*, "Students Attempt To Get Principal Back in Savannah," col. 1, pg. 1, March 22, 1961; "School Crisis in Savannah Spreads," col. 2, pg. 1, March 23, 1961; "Walkout Wave in Savannah Slows," col. 7, pg. 1, March 24, 1961 "More Students Back in School in Savannah," col. 8, pg. 1, March 25, 1961. http://bsc.chadwyck.com/home/home.do. Accessed March 2, 2010
[66] Ibid.

Georgia during this period was the Albany Movement. The Albany Movement was extremely important to the period because it extended the movement beyond Atlanta. Tuck noted that besides Atlanta, "the Albany Movement received most of the national headlines, largely because of the involvement of Martin Luther King Jr. and the huge scale of protestors."[67] Extending the movement beyond Atlanta was important because it depicted that blacks faced injustices throughout Georgia and there were a number of youth willing to respond to those injustices. Furthermore, the location of Albany was vital because of the number of blacks that resided in southwest Georgia.

One of the original organizers of the Albany Movement was Mr. Charles Sherrod. Shortly after his arrival, he noted, "the movement is a protest and it is an affirmation. We protest and take direct action against conditions of discrimination. We affirm equality and brotherhood of all men." [68] He also noted that a large component of the movement was to "organize and recruit youth" because they believed youth were vital to the creation and the survival of the movement. So the demands for "equal service at lunch counters, in the libraries, bus terminals and swimming pools" came from the youth.

In addition to the demands made by youth, the Albany Movement became pivotal in the region for its boldness in the way demands were made. Albany was less concerned about promoting an image of racial progression than Atlanta. So college-age and secondary school age children were more susceptible to violent acts. Mr. Sherrod noted, "We had to go through some suffering, [besides] going to jail, people were getting shot

[67] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 108; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters : America in the King Years 1954-63*, First Paperback Edition (Simon & Schuster, 1989).
[68] Harris, "SNCC Papers," n.d., King Center.

at, some people houses were burned, churches too."[69] In the midst of all of violence, the Albany Movement survived and influenced places like Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie.

A viable lesson learned from the Albany Movement, according to a SNCC member who participated, was the development of voicing one's frustration despite the backlash. The letter stated, "What is most impressive is black youth suddenly felt able to express their frustrations in action which forced the white power structure to listen to them.[70] Because of the activity in Albany, black youth suffering injustices in silence were no longer a practical option in the 1960s. This was not only true for those who lived within the city limits of Albany, it permeated throughout the region and emboldened black students throughout southwest Georgia to voice their frustrations and demand equality. While the Albany Movement is often critiqued for not yielding fundamental changes, despite the attention and the resources it garnered, the inspiration it had on youth activism that sprang up during and after the Albany Movement cannot be diminished. When black youth rose up against the ethos of Jim Crow in Albany, it gave black youth a script in which they could adopt to tackle the issues they faced in their local communities.

The case of the Albany Movement is not an anomaly in youth activism during this period in Georgia. Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie also had protests linked to the activity taking place in Albany.  Youth in these three locales grew weary of political disenfranchisement, economic immobilization their parents' often endured and educational disparities. Inspired by the activism in Albany, they formulated a plan of action that directly attacked the status quo.

[69] Charles Sherrod, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Albany, Georgia, July 23, 2012, July 23, 2012.
[70] Henrietta Fuller, "SNCC Paper," September 13, 1963, King Center, SNCC Papers; Harris, "SNCC Papers."

## Chapter 3

## No National Spotlight, but Determined to Leave a Legacy: Black Youth in Tifton, Georgia

Jason Sokol's work captured why whites were so opposed to change when he argued that "Jim Crow had defined the lives and minds of white people in the South and the Civil Rights Movement challenged the life that they were comfortable with."[1] Although Atlanta was dubbed the "city too busy too hate," Tifton realized in the early twentieth century the importance the appearance of good race relations had on business. An examination of Tifton's history portrays how the founders of the town were very interested in their image but had little interest in challenging the customs established by Jim Crow. Although Atlanta is given credit as one of the few southern cities that chose business over racial tension, Tifton adopted a similar model in the late nineteenth century.

Tifton is approximately 50 miles southeast of Albany and 60 miles from the border of Florida. Being so close to Albany, one would think most of the town's norms mirrored Albany and to an extent it did. The social and political norms of Tifton were nearly identical to those of it neighbor to the northwest; however, the economic model of commerce overriding the racial norms reflected the customs of Atlanta. To a degree, this distinguished Tifton from the largest metropolis in southwest Georgia. Being a port city to Georgia, it made sense for the town to adopt a business model similar to Atlanta because it had viable means that were in high demand.

[1] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

While Tifton's economic foundation was solid, the portrayal of business over racial conflict worked best when there was no social upheaval. For decades Tifton had been able to escape the social disturbances usually caused by the inequities of Jim Crow. This allowed the town to perpetuate itself as a racially progressive place. But by the 1960s, the rhetoric of progressiveness was challenged by black youth through multiple forms of protests. The reality of what blacks had endured for decades was elevated and Tifton, like Atlanta and Albany, had to deal with a frustrated populace. While Tifton did not have the violent backlash to blacks attempting to change the customs of Jim Crow like Albany, white Tiftonians were just as loyal to segregation as their neighbors in Albany, which meant that opposition looked different but the purpose was the same. The image that white Tiftonians attempted to portray provides some context for the type of backlash they chose to use. Furthermore, the town's history illuminates why the opposition was not as violent in Tifton.

### Background

Historian John Fair noted that "slavery was never practiced within its environs," which meant that the town did not have to deal with the remnants of slavery.[2] Tifton, somewhat like Atlanta, was very conscious of its racial image. Therefore, the history of Tifton tends to be about the economic sector. In the early twentieth century, Tifton had turned into a small town where businesses prospered. According to John Fair, "Tifton's founder—[Captain Henry Harding Tift]—had the foresight to diversify the agriculture and agribusiness operations and to endow both with the scientific expertise of an experiment station and agriculture college. As late as 1945, 91% of county lands were

[2] John D. Fair, *The Tifts of Georgia: Connecticut Yankees in King Cotton's Court*, 1st ed (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 2010), 245. It is important to note that Tifton was not founded until 1890 which is nearly thirty years after slavery had been abolished in the South.

used for farming. By the mid-1960s, income from agriculture exceeded $15 million yearly."[3] Tifton, which dubbed itself the "Friendly City," also had a thriving community that had amenities such as an opera house, several silent saloons, and churches. One of the town's most publicized treasures was the Myon hotel which was supposed to be one of the grandest hotels south of Atlanta. Tifton continued to see economic and population growth while being able to suppress racial issues that would damage the town's brand of being an economic viable place with good race relations.

Although the history of Tifton provides an example of how some rural towns were capable of suppressing racial tensions in order to attract businesses, the history also illustrates that the absence of direct-action protest does not mean the presence of equality and full citizenship. This kind of model permeated throughout Georgia. In reality, it was a microcosm of the philosophies and procedures that permeated through the state. Very few places in Georgia, if any, could tout that by the mid-twentieth century they were willing to make drastic changes to achieve equality. They were willing to make concessions to make themselves attractive to businesses, but when it came to creating a public school system that was equal, they followed the typical business model that other southern states followed. Consistent with this conclusion, Alton Hornsby noted that "the Sibley Commission found that Georgians by a three-to-two margin still opposed the changing of their laws and customs on race."[4]

Fair mostly ignores the activism that occurred in Tifton before the 1960s. Although he admits "the omnipresent issue of race looms in Tifton," he concluded "the

[3] Fair, *The Tifts of Georgia*, 245.
[4] Alton Hornsby, "Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954-1973: From Segregation to Segregation," *The Journal of Negro History* 76, no. 1/4 (January 1, 1991): 23.

black population never threatened white hegemony that tempered activism during the Civil Rights Era."[5] His conclusion ignores the activism of Mrs. Dee and Mr. Doc Melton Sr. who were seen as pioneers by the black community of challenging the white hegemony that existed in Tifton. Furthermore, he ignores how the town's hegemony was consistently challenged by black youth and civil rights' organizations during the mid-twentieth century.

Fair's omission is not isolated only in the historical narrative of Tifton. The town's brochure and the *Georgia Encyclopedia* also fail to show how white hegemony was attacked without black Tiftonians attacking segregation. For example, Mrs. Dee and Mr. Doc Melton Sr. were prominent black business owners in Tifton which serviced the black community so segregation was not their issue.[6] Their issue was the inherent message segregation sent, which was blacks were less than full-citizens. This message had profound consequences because it often resulted in the black community in Tifton receiving less. Therefore, the Meltons created organizations like the Tift County Improvement Club and organized chapters of organizations such as the NAACP to improve the lives of black Tiftonians not necessarily to integrate with whites.

According to the *Tifton Gazette*, "[Doc Melton Sr.] took a stand for justice during the time when there was no representation in Tifton for the black community with his wife by his side."[7] By elevating the voices and experiences of blacks in Tifton, we see that racial violence was not the only igniter for movements but the simple need to be

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[5] Fair, *The Tifts of Georgia*, 248.
[6] For more information how pivotal Mrs. Dee and Mr. Doc Melton Sr. were to the foundation of the Civil Rights Movement in Tifton read "Legendary Figures Remembered," *Tifton Gazette*, accessed February 1, 2013, http://tiftongazette.com/x253819186/Legendary-figures-remembered.
[7] Tifton Gazette, "Museum Celebrates 1st Anniversary," February 27, 2012, http://tiftongazette.com/x1875168761/Museum-celebrates-1st-anniversary/print.

treated as a citizen was a justifiable cause as well. While the history of Tifton attempts to paint a picture of a small town that was genteel and friendly, what brewed underneath the facade of friendliness and tolerance were systematic inequalities that a number of blacks in Tifton felt compelled to address.

White Tiftonians were proud of the culture they had produced and preserved in their town. In contrast, black youth were quickly growing weary of second-class citizenship they faced and its impact on their parents. Because of these influences, youth movements sprang up in towns like Tifton and became a place where black youth challenged long-held customs that treated them as second-class citizens. As Stephen Tuck argued, "grassroots protest was influenced by national organizations and headline-grabbing confrontations. During the 1960s, the template of nonviolent direct action campaigns was copied and adapted by activists in communities throughout Georgia."[8] In addition to being influenced by organizations and confrontational events, grassroots protests also spoke directly to the concerns of the local community. Even though the fight for full citizenship and equality was a national movement, its ability to be curtailed to issues facing individual communities is what made it attractive and oftentimes successful. Informed by their own experiences and the waves of the Civil Rights Movement close by, black youth in Tifton sought to create a movement in which equality was the primary priority.

## It Is Not All Bad

The economic opportunities for blacks in Tifton were not prosperous but a number of them were able to obtain decent factory and industrial jobs. Others were able

[8] Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (University of Georgia Press, 2003), 3.

to create businesses for themselves, which helped to create a vibrant black commercial and social district called the New Front. Johnny Terrell, born and raised in Tifton, remembered as a youth "black and white people getting along because blacks moved freely around whites." He also noted that "Blacks and whites worked together and had good relationships until the movement came."[9] There were a number of sectors in Tifton that allowed blacks and whites to interact with each other because segregation in the workplace was fluid. Blacks and whites shared the same proximal space. At the plant, typical Jim Crow customs of the day, such as separate water fountains and restroom, separated citizens, but in domestic work, the notion of separate became fluid because interaction between whites and blacks was constant. Education, however, was the area in which the customs of segregation were not fluid. Even in a quiet and friendly town like Tifton, black and white children were to remain completely segregated, regardless of the *Brown* decision.

White Tiftonians opposition to *Brown* did not differ much from other places in southwest Georgia. In fact, according to testimonies before the Sibley Commission, the majority of the witnesses from Tift County favored closing public schools rather than seeing any form of integration occur.[10] While blacks in Tifton were aware of the position that their white counterparts held, they were not too distraught about segregation because they were proud of their academic institutions. Similar to what Vanessa Siddle Walker and David Cecelski found in their works, black Tiftonians believed that through education students could overcome racial inequities so school was the vehicle in which

[9] Johnny Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012, July 21, 2012.
[10] Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 138.

the message was delivered.[11] So while white Tiftonians were trying to figure out how to circumvent *Brown*, black Tiftonians focused on educating black children which was a legacy that dated back to the early 20th century.[12]

By the mid-20th century, blacks in Tifton had two schools—Tift County Industrial Elementary and High School and Wilson Elementary and High School—that they were proud of and that "provided an atmosphere that is productive of sound bodies and minds for our community, state, and country." Industrial was the oldest of the two schools and what alumni remembered were principals like Mr. Deas, Mr. Emerson Bynes, and Mr. Mack. Mr. Deas was the first principal of Industrial but it was under Principal Bynes leadership when the attendance doubled. He was able to secure buses for his students which was a great feat during this period, and added a playground. Although students remember their resources improving under the guidance of Mr. Bynes, it was Mr. Mack who "emphasized a more comprehensible curriculum and required students to complete twelfth grade before graduating."[13]

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[11] David S Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Although both studies took place in North Carolina, the pride and philosophy they discussed in their works was also adopted by the black educators in Tifton.

[12] It is not surprising that public school officials did not place a high premium on educating black children, particularly in the early 1900s. As Tifton experienced phenomenal growth in the first decade of the 20th century, a public high school was built for whites. However, a school for blacks was not built until 1917. See Kayla L. Tillman, "Tifton: From Indian Trails to I-75," *Tifton Magazine*, December 1990; "The Tiger 1930-170" (Tifton County Pulic School, July 1990). I could not find any evidence that suggests whites had to fight for a school but there is evidence that illuminates how the school board delayed providing education for black children for over a decade. According to The Tiger, Johnny Wilson, a black pioneer of education in Tifton, strongly promoted learning for black school children. He appeared before the county and city boards of education for assistance to build a descent school building and always received a vote of sympathy and promise to financial aid as soon as they were available. After receiving from assistance from Mrs. H.H. Tift , Mrs. N. Peterson and six acres of land from Captain Tift's cousin, Industrial Elementary was built in 1917 then the high school was added in 1929.

[13] "The Tiger 1930-170," 15–16.

Alumnis of Industrial Elementary and Wilson High School have fond memories of their institutions but they do remember the difference in the conditions at each school. The history of Wilson is a different than the history of Industrial because Industrial was a typical black school built before the *Brown* so by the mid-1950 it needed a number of improvements. Wilson was built in 1957 so students did not have to deal with poor conditions related to the actual building itself. Although students who attended Wilson had a new building, what they remember most about the school was the education and the activities that took place inside of the building. According to *The Tiger*, many students were awarded scholarships, prizes, grants and opportunities for higher education." Students at Wilson also excelled in other areas such as chorus, band, drama, and athletics. In addition to excelling academically and through extra-curricular activities, a communal component at Wilson existed. Mr. Mack, who succeeded Mr. Bynes as principal of Industrial and was the first principal at Wilson, revived an adult program that offered basic reading courses to help adults improve their literacy level.[14] So the belief that the school and the community were interconnected was a philosophy that permeated throughout Wilson and those who attended the school recalled the importance of this relationship. An alumnus from Wilson stated that "Wilson was a vital and integral part of the community from August, 1957 until its closing in June 1970."[15]

The recollections from alumnis who attended Industrial and Wilson suggest that their educational experience was not all bad. In fact, a number of them noted that their school years were some of the most enjoyable because of what they received from the

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[14] Ibid., 17–18.

[15] Tillman, "Tifton: From Indian Trails to I-75." Also, Walker described in her work a similar relationship between Caswell County Training School and the larger black community. Therefore, the relationship between black Tiftonians and the two black schools is a continuation of the partnership between institution and community which existed before and remained intact after *Brown.*

institutions. They remember Industrial and Wilson as places that provided a space for them and gave them a sense of self and purpose. In a town that designated them as something less than, students were able to find somewhat of a counter narrative at school.[16] At school, their intellect and talents were cultivated and not deemed as something inferior. At school, students could be homecoming kings and queens and participate in plays that were outside of societal stereotypes. In addition to being cultivated at the two black schools in Tifton, black youth also had models that illuminated that they did not have to accept the class status that Tifton's societal norms attempted to place on them.

Black teachers and black principals played a pivotal role in how alumnis reflect on their educational experiences. Alton Pertilla, who attended Industrial and Wilson, stated that "during segregation there was an intense and practically laser like emphasis on getting an education, getting prepared. . . [Although] we were aware of second-class characteristics and the nature of [our] educational experience[s], the thing we had going for us was the teachers were motivators, they were concerned [about their students]"[17] Youth had a sense of pride in their institution and for their principals and teachers. Walter Dykes, another alumnus of Industrial and Wilson, recalled the respect he had for Principal Bynes. He stated, "Mr. Bynes was highly respected. He would get as much as [he could] for black folks and my grandmother always told me, Professor Bynes is for

[16] What Walker has dubbed "No poverty of the Spirit" was exercised in Tifton as well. She stated that although most blacks in Caswell County were poor, "they forged a system of schooling that empathized the importance of teacher/student relationships, valued activities as a key means of developing the students' many talents, and believed in the children's ability to learn and their own ability to teach." See Walker, *Their Highest Potential*, 200.
[17] Alton Pertilla, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012, n.d.

us."[18] Dykes remembered how his respect for Principal Bynes was based on the fact that he did not accept the fact that his school should have less than the white schools. He talked about how a number of black Tiftonians accepted "whatever white folks gave us" but in observing his principal and some of the teachers, he realized what Frederick Douglass realized nearly a century earlier which was "power concedes nothing without a demand."[19] Therefore, the educational experiences of students at Industrial and Wilson went beyond the realm of academics. Rather intended or unintended, it also included not being satisfied with the status quo.

School pride notwithstanding, black youth recognized the inequalities in their education. Black principals and teachers at Industrial and Wilson did a laudable job teaching their students that they were just as intelligent and as much of a citizen as their white counterparts. However, they could not explain away the gulf in resources between the white schools and the black schools. Nor could they ignore the constant reminder that what they received was always second-hand. When asked about their educational experiences, they discussed how the inherent inequalities were persistent.

Tifton had in common with other places in southwest Georgia and throughout the South a public school system that was segregated and inherently unequal. A few black youth noticed these inequities and felt obligated to do something about it so they began to attack the social norms of Tifton. Eventually, what began as frequent disruptions to the social norms of Tifton evolved into a social movement that challenged the small metropolis' way of life.

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[18] Walter Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012, n.d.
[19] Frederick Douglass, "Frederick Douglass Project Writings: West India Emancipation," University of Rochester Frederick Douglass Project, accessed February 20, 2013, http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=4398.

## So What is There to Complain About? It is not Equal

The *Brown* decision had no impact in Tifton from 1954-1965. Even though *Brown I* outlawed the practice of public segregation and *Brown II* supposedly sped up desegregation, in Tifton, like so many other southern towns and cities, time remained still.[20] Black and white Tiftonians alike did not discuss the watershed case so it had very little impact on the educational experiences of black youth. Dkyes, Pertilla, and Terrell are all natives of Tifton, Georgia and attended segregated schools after the passage of *Brown*. Dykes said "I don't remember anything about [Brown]. All I remember, we saw it on the news, we saw the demonstration[s], they had sit-ins, they were saying separate but equal but me personally, I don't remember that much about it."[21] Pertilla, who is a little older than Dykes, suggested that *Brown* was discussed but not in any formal sense. He stated, "[I remember] *Brown* in particular being discussed and I remember in particular Little Rock. . . I know inside of my circle and my family I know it was discussed because we were into current events and current affairs . . . now it may not have been 'lets sit down and talk about the *Brown versus the Board of Ed*.' but people were aware of the struggle for integration and the integration of the schools. They were aware of *Brown*, they were aware of the Montgomery bus boycott. All of the stuff that was happening, it was a little isolated."[22] When Terrell was asked about what he remembered about the case he stated, "I can't remember a whole lot . . . I just can't

[20] Byrne, Dara N, *Brown V. Board of Education: Its Impact on Public Education, 1954-2004* (Word For Word Pub. Co, 2005); Derrick A Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown V. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform* (Oxford University Press, 2004); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown V. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (Vintage, 2004); Michael J. Klarman, *Brown v. Board of Education and the civil rights movement : abridged edition of From Jim Crow to civil rights : the Supreme Court and the struggle for racial equality* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Brian J Daugherity and Charles C Bolton, *With All Deliberate Speed: Implementing Brown V. Board of Education* (University of Arkansas Press, 2008).

[21] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012.

[22] Pertilla, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012.

remember because it was not really discussed,”[23] Although Dykes, Pertilla, and Terrell’s memory differs on the degree in which *Brown* was discussed, all of them noted that the case did not affect their educational experience at all.[24]

The stagnation of *Brown* in Tifton may have had as much to do with the black community as it did with white opposition to the case. Unlike Little Rock or Prince Edward County, Virginia, there is little evidence of black Tiftonians demanding desegregation or having a willingness to ask black youth to endure such hardship. Although someone could argue that blacks were fearful of white backlash, it is more plausible that segregation was not their primary concern. They had two academic institutions in Tifton that they were pleased with. Therefore, their primary complaint was not with the segregation of public schools but with the practice of always having to go without. Even though blacks had their own institutions in Tifton, they had little to no say as to how the resources were allocated. The lack of input created a number of problems because white Tiftonians evidently assumed that as long as blacks had a building that was sufficient enough, the upkeep was an afterthought.

While the federal decision attempted to solve the resource disparities by putting everyone together, a number of blacks in Tifton, particularly the youth, believed the town’s black schools should receive the same funding as their white counterparts. Too often integration became synonymous with equality after 1954, but for places like Tifton where integration was a foreign idea, educational equality took on more of a practical meaning. Black Tiftonians, who protested as youth, constantly reiterated that the

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[23] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.

[24] It is important to note that the *Tifton Gazette*, which is the town’s local newspaper, did not cover *Brown I* or *Brown II*. Also, see Tillman, “Tifton: From Indian Trails to I-75.”She claims that Tifton passed a three step desegregation plan to meet federal guidelines in 1968.

disparities that existed between black and white schools caused them to organize.[25] As Mr. Terrell stated, "We accepted the so called segregation, right. But we wanted equality. Equal was okay. You've got your schools, we've got our schools. We want the same thing you've got. We pay taxes and we want the same things. We didn't talk about integration. We were okay; we should've had the same size equipment you've got and in all the schools we wanted the equipment like you've got."[26] A summation of black youth complaints to the Tifton County School Board during the early 1960s was simple: resource disparities.

Even though black youth educational experiences in Tifton were in direct contrast with *Brown*, they did not attribute the contrast to the fact that integration did not occur. The contrast was based on the fact that black schools remained the depository of white students' hand-me-down materials. Black schools in Tifton either needed structural work done to them or when they did get a new building, like they did with Wilson, viable resources were missing. They were constantly reassured that what they had was second-hand to what white schools had because the materials they received were no longer good enough for their white counterparts.

Dykes recalled that even though Wilson was a new school, the books they received were second-hand. Furthermore, Pertilla recalled how second-class citizenship was forced upon black youth, he harkened back to his days as a student. He stated, "I resented the fact that during my entire public school career, I probably could only remember getting four or five brand new books because what happened [was] that the

[25] Pertilla, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012; Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012; Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.
[26] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.

white people would give us the books the white students had last year and we only got new books in those cases where they didn't have enough of the old ones to go around."[27] The custom of blacks being the recipient of whites' outdated materials oftentimes is glossed over as a byproduct of Jim Crow. However, these practices had a profound impact on how black youth conceptualized equality, and it influenced them to become active participants in challenging a practice that designated the best resources for whites and the hand-me-downs for blacks.

Pertilla recalled that segregation rarely bothered him, but his primary complaint was seeing the previous owners' names—Sarah and James—in his book. While those names were constant reminders to him, he also noted "it intensified the awareness of my generation of what our struggle had to be about more so than a set of specific kind of things that happen[ed]."[28] Terrell was a couple of grades behind Pertilla, but he remembered not only being bothered by the hand-me-down books but the fact that the used materials were outdated added to his frustration. He noted that black youth became aware that their books were previously owned by whites as early as elementary school but the discovery of the materials being outdated did not come until he was in high school. He stated, "I had a book in the 8th grade, a science book that was published in 1953 and my mom worked for a doctor and she found [his child's science book] and realized it was published more recently."[29] Once his mother informed him of her discovery, he realized what Pertilla had comprehended a couple of years earlier. For equality to exist, the custom of white students receiving what was new and updated while

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[27] Pertilla, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.

black students received what was old and outdated had to be eliminated. The legal arena attempted to outlaw this custom through integration but by the early to mid-1960s Tifton officials had successfully maintained Jim Crow traditions that were pivotal in the educational experiences of black Tiftonians.

Students were also concerned with a lack of resources. Dykes, for example, discussed how Wilson did not have a football field or a gymnasium, which meant that they had to use the facilities at the white school. He stated,

> "We didn't have a gym. We didn't have a football team, we didn't have nothing. So when we had to practice football we had to practice on the rocks . . . I told me principal, I said we're practicing on these rocks and they practicing on the field. They had the stadium. Okay, now when we played our Friday games our schedule had to around, whatever their schedule was we had to do our schedule. Because out of their so call good heart, they let us use the stadium, so when we played at the stadium at Tiff County Stadium, now our grandma taxes help pay for this stuff. We put our schedule out so we can play at their park, if they were not playing. We went to the white people to make the schedule and when they weren't using the stadium, that's when we got to use the stadium" [30]

Black youth had a concept of equality because they lived with inequality for so long. They realized that the stadium was owned by the county, which meant that even though all the citizens of Tifton owned the stadium, whites had first priority.[31] Black students in Tifton understood that having to schedule events around their white counterparts was more than a custom of segregation. It was an explicit denial of equality. Therefore, having great teachers, principals, and pride in their school could not camouflage the

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[30] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012.

[31] See James D Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 154–157. He discussed how the practice of taking tax dollars from black schools to fund white schools was common place. Anderson also stated, "that since the Reconstruction era black southerners had adapted to a structure of oppressive education by participating double taxation." Although, there is no evidence that suggests blacks Tiftonians double taxed themselves, we do know that because of the laws of Jim Crow, black tax dollars were funding facilities that they could not use or that they could not use as freely as whites.

ingrained inequalities of being given secondhand materials and not being able to use public facilities in Tifton.[32]

Black youth's primary grievance was with the lack of fairness that permeated throughout their town. Determined to leave their own legacy, they challenged the customs that they felt prevented blacks from enjoying the full citizenship. Led by Dykes and Major Wright, they devised a plan that challenged the core of Tifton's genteel and quiet image.[33]

### Frustrated and Fearless

Unfortunately, the national media did not give a lot of attention to Tifton because it did not have a local politician using armed guards to prevent them from entering public facilities. Nor did they witness any form of terrorism such as the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing that occurred in Birmingham, Alabama. Although organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) aided in the Tifton Movement, the movement neither had the organizational presence as in other locales in southwest Georgia nor the luxury of an iconic leader bringing the national spotlight to the area.[34]

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[32] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012. Dykes also said that black students were barred from the county library as well. According to him, "if you wanted to check out a book [black students] had to tell our teachers to check out a book and she would have to go down to the white library cause our library was minimal. She would go check out the book for you because that was the policy in Tifton."

[33] Mr. Major Wright changed his name to Mr. J.K. Obatala

[34] See Christopher Meyers, ed., *The Empire State of the South: Georgia History in Documents and Essays* (Mercer University Press, 2008); David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2004).

By the 1960s, Hasan Jeffries noted "Black political chatter had increased significantly. . . Conversations about civil activities occurred everywhere."[35] The uptick of political chatter was not absent in Tifton, particularly among youth. Black youth in Tifton had grown frustrated with the status quo and they did not believe that their parents could solve the issue. In fact, a letter by Principal R.L. Mack and a student, Major Wright, illustrate the friction that existed between young and old. Mr. Mack's letter stated, "Our boys and girls are ourselves, acting like a different generation, speaking their own language and creating their own world. . . They yearn to be free individuals"[36] Wright's letter stated, "[Mr. Mack] was for us, I suppose, something like the proverbial lighthouse, always offering guidance and direction. . . But the lighthouse of the old guard stood on a lonely island of fear, humility and submission. Its beacon burned atop the rotting carcasses of Booker T. Washington and the pioneers of his Era of Acquiescence."[37]

In both letters there is admiration for the other but definitely a very different philosophy. Black youth in Tifton, like so many youth of the 1960s, felt adults were too comfortable with gradualism and too fearful of whites. In contrast, black adults believed youth were not fearful enough. Black parents understood the dangers of Jim Crow.

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[35] Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 40; Charles M Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1996).
[36] "The Tiger" (The Senior Class of Wilson High School, 1962), 6.
[37] J.K. Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," *The New York Times*, December 2, 1973, 37.

Furthermore, they, like Principal Mack, understood the economic ramifications of challenging the status quo that youth had no way of understanding.[38]

Although black youth who grew up in Tifton did not dismiss the advice of adults, their frustration and fearlessness, along with other nearby movements, compelled them to disregard the advice from adults and act. While black youth witnessed a number of adults shying away from the movement, they were able to garner support from a few adults, like Mr. Solomon Nixon, who sided with their cause and tactics. Mr. Nixon and his family were known as a pillar of the black community because they were one of the few self-sustaining black families in Tifton. Unlike so many black adults in Tifton, Mr. Nixon, also known as "Pops," did not depend on whites for his livelihood so he did not have to worry about white backlash.[39] Therefore, he was able to provide aid to black youth that was pivotal to the movement.

First, Mr. Nixon helped students from Wilson, which included Dkyes, attend a SCLC event in Macon, Georgia which inspired them to organize in Tifton. According to Dykes, Mr. Nixon sponsored their trip to hear Dr. King speak. Mr. Nixon paid for him and a number of students' transportation, lodging, and food." He believed this trip was very important because after hearing Dr. King's speech, they returned to Tifton and initiated the Tifton Youth Chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

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[38] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012. It is important to note that the friction that existed between youth and adults was somewhat fluid. Yes, there were a number of adults that felt like the youth movement brought unnecessary trouble. However, some adults disagreed with the movement publicly but privately supported the youth fully. Mr. Dykes recalled a private conversation he had with an older black lady that really inspired him. He stated, "She said look son, I cannot express myself [publicly] about this but I am so glad that you guys are doing something because these white people [didn't plan on changing the status quo]. She told me that she could not join [the movement] because they [would] have fired her . . . but she said I see what y'all young people are doing and she said keep on doing it."

[39] Ibid. Mr. Solomon Nixon was the co-owner of Frank and Solomon Nixon Funeral Home in Tifton, Georgia. The Funeral Home was founded in 1925 by his father, Frank Thomas "Pa Frank" Nixon.

(TYCSCLC).[40] Second, Mr. Nixon sponsored another trip for a number of youth to attend a SCLC event in Savannah, Georgia. One of the students who attended the event was Wright, who was the student Dkyes promoted as the leader when he graduated from Wilson High. Mr. Terrell remembered Mr. Nixon sponsoring their trip to Savannah and even letting them drive his car.[41] Because of the financial support Dkyes, Wright, and Terrell received from Mr. Nixon, they were able to attend events which inspired them to act. In a place where adult support was limited, black youth found a pivotal adult ally in Mr. Nixon who greatly contributed to the struggle for equality in Tifton.

Besides receiving internal support from Mr. Nixon, black youth received external adult support from statesmen of the movement like Dr. King and his national organization. Although Dr. King never made it to Tifton and SCLC did not have a substantial presence until 1963, their support for youth activism was evident by the charter they granted to the TYCSCLC. In addition to receiving support, the type of activism promoted by Dr. King and the SCLC spoke volumes to the youth of Tifton, which could not be said about the adults in Tifton. For example, Wright felt his principal's approach to dealing with second-class citizenship was so antiquated due in large part because it lacked confrontation. He stated, "Birmingham, Martin Luther King, the Freedom Riders, Autherine Lucy . . . these were the names and places that had been echoing against the walls of every juke joint, church, and bootleg house in Tifton, these were the names that buzzed across the tables of the cafeteria at Wilson—and that led me out of the internal prison of docility." [42] The admiration that Wright and his

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.

[42] Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 37.

contemporaries had for Dr. King and certain organizations illuminates that they were influenced by adults who did not allow their fear to prevent them from challenging the status quo. The external support they received from the two trips increased their resolve and upon their returen from Macon and Savannah, they were more determined to start a movement in Tifton utilizing direct-action.[43]

**The Beginning**

In the spring of 1962, the youth movement in Tifton began when a meeting was called at Beulah Hill Baptist Church. Although the meeting was not well attended, the six or seven youth who were at the meeting named a president of the organization and identified the issues they would use to galvanize the youth. Dykes was named the president and voter registration was the issue that they chose to unite around.[44] While the first meeting did not have a large number of youth in attendance, the second meeting, which took place at Allen Temple A.M.E. church, did have more attendees, although the increase seemed to have very little to do with the level of consciousness and more to do with the youth's desire to socialize. After a weak response to the first meeting, Dykes noted that he had to tweak his strategy. He was not naïve and recognized that everyone did not join social movements because of societal ills. Many wanted to socialize and

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[43] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *NAACP Youth File. General Department File. Membership Campaign, 1956-1960*, Papers of the NAACP. Part 19, Youth File. Series D, 1956-1965, Youth Department Files ;; Reel 13, Fr. 0491-0606; Variation: Papers of the NAACP.; Part 19,; Youth File. Series D,; 1956-1965, Youth Department Files ;; Reel 13, Fr. 0491-0606. (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1998). Mr. Dykes said that although King was not at the event other prominent members of the SCLC were. After he returned from Macon, he and a number of his colleagues to a trip up to Albany where they were advised by C.B. King on how to start a movement. According to Mr. Dykes "C.B. King gave [them] the particulars on organizing around non-violent principals. If we started a student movement, this is what you do, how if someone [got] violent, you cover your head up. He also recalled that once they started the movement in Tifton they initially did not have a charter. However, the NAACP did grant them a charter on November 5, 1962 but Dykes had already graduated by then.

[44] When asked why the youth chose voter registration as the issue to address, Mr. Dykes stated, "That was the going thing then. You know, you get involved in the movement, you registered people to vote. We went through that experience of registering black people to vote."

Dkyes used that component to draw people to the movement. Dykes stated, "I knew that when the females got into it the brothers were going to follow. . . The girls controlled everything so I said I am going to get the girls so I went back to my class and got with [the] girls."[45] He also believed that his female classmates were better organizers, which he knew was a vital component to a successful social movement.[46] Apart from just getting students to attend the meetings, youth leaders—Dkyes, Wright, Charlotte D, and others—knew that convincing their classmates to act would be a process.

Youth leaders understood for a movement to survive in Tifton, their classmates would have to transition from socialites to social activists. Voter registration began the transition because political disenfranchisement was prevalent in Tifton. However, the evolution was not completed until youth leaders elevated the educational disparities ignited the youth rally. By the early 1960s, young black Tiftonians could see how voter suppression, lack of economic opportunities, and educational disparities were all interconnected. Black youth in Tifton began to ask very simple questions, and all of their questions directly related to how they conceptualized equality. Dykes stated, "my whole thing was [my grandma was] paying taxes, why can't I go to the library? It said county library. It didn't [say] black folk library, it didn't say white county library, it said library and we pay taxes just like [white folks in Tifton so] why can't we go?"[47] He and others

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[45] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012.

[46] For a discussion on gender politics that occurred within the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement read Chana Lee Lee, "Anger, Memory, and Personal Power: Fannie Lou Hamer and Civil Rights Leadership," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 139–170; Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965* (Indiana University Press, 1993).

[47] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012. Dykes noted that he also posed these questions to his principal, Mr. Mack. Mr. Mack evidently was not happy with the tension that Dykes had caused during his senior year. Dykes stated, "When I was finishing, he told me, y'all started

also began to question why blacks were not allowed to go to the county pool or the county library when black tax dollars were being used to fund these facilities. They questioned why these kinds of amenities did not exist on their side of town and why their streets were unpaved.[48] Black youth questioning the status quo of Jim Crow brought angst to the supposedly quiet and genteel town, but it was the utilization of direct action that turned nervousness into discomfort and resulted in white Tiftonians making some concessions.

A primary factor that contributed to the shift in approaches was the change in leadership. Dykes was an effective leader, respected and admired by his classmates, but he graduated from Wilson months after the movement began and enrolled at Payne College in the fall. Prior to leaving his position as president, he chose his successor. Unlike the protocol followed when he was elected president, he told the group that Major Wright was the president. He did not seek advice from other members within the organization nor was he concerned with anyone who disagreed with his decision. He believed for the movement to continue and be effective, Wright had to be president. Dykes recalled why he felt so strongly about Wright being president, he stated "Major Wright, he lived in Brookfield [but] the brother would come to meetings on time. He came 10 miles away. So I [liked the fact that he worked] and was enthusiastic about stuff." In addition to being impressed by Wright's commitment and enthusiasm, he also believed that the "other dudes were clowns" in comparison." Even though Dykes did not

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all this mess. We know how to deal with white people. Y'all don't know what y'all doing. I said Mr. Mack they have a county pool over there. I said that is Tift County [and] why can't we go to the county pool [and] Mr. Mack I don't accept that. My grandma sends her taxes, why can't we go to the county pool?

[48] Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 39. Obatala noted that the streets in the black section were called Froggy Buttom, Tin Pan Alley, and Still Quarters.

elaborate on why he thought the others were not qualified to lead, based on the events that transpired after he left, his decision proved to be the right choice.[49]

The tactics under Wright's leadership did shift but the philosophy of the movement was very similar. The youth movement under Dykes ran by a simple yet profound philosophy. If black tax dollars were being used to fund particular projects in the county, black people should have access to those amenities. During our interview, he reiterated this belief several times. He stated, "my thing was this, to be honest I didn't care about the integration stuff . . . [wherever my grandmother's taxes are being spent, I should be able to go] . . . pure and simple"[50] Although the tactics changed under Wright, the philosophy of the movement did not. Wright's vision aligned with the former president in that both agreed that the movement had to be about equality. The fact that the leaders of the youth movement shared similar philosophies should not be a surprise because their involvement in the movement was similar as well. While their decision to become involved in the movement took place at very different locations—Dykes in Macon, Georgia and Wright in Savannah, Georgia—the person who inspired them was the same. Dkyes, Wright, and the youth who made up the youth movement in Tifton remembered exactly where they where and who they were with when they decided to become a part of the civil rights movement. Above all, they remembered who inspired

[49] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012; Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 38. As Obatala reflected back on this same event, he summed it up this way, "One night a few weeks before, at Allen Temple A.M.E. Church, Walter Dykes. . . put his hands on my shoulders and told the audience that I would be the new president because he was going to college. There were no votes, no protests and no questions asked from the floor, just applause."

[50] Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012. Dykes also talked about how his philosophy was based on logic. He stated, "I thought that people were logical people and they would say well if you have been paying taxes and you got a county facility, you can use it. Even if they only [pay a percentage of the cost of the building], you can only use ¼ of this building, I can understand that but I never could understand [not being able to use a county building], it's a county building."

them to believe they could make fundamental changes in their community. That inspirational leader was Dr. King.

While most scholars who examine Dr. King's activism in southwest Georgia tend to focus primarily on Albany and to some extent on Americus, his approach to social change permeated throughout southwest Georgia. Dkyes, Wright, and Terrell noted how attending an event where Dr. King spoke correlated with their decision to fight for equality in their community. "We went to Savannah to hear Dr. Martin Luther King's speech," Terrell stated "when we come back from Savannah we just said we would just go ahead and do like people are doing in Savannah. And I think Major had talked to several people over there and we had gotten our own ideas of what we really wanted to do."[51]

In addition to being inspired by Dr. King, the rhetoric of fairness and citizenship used by the great orator to inspire people to act was also adopted by Dkyes and Wright to persuade their classmates to become more involved. When Dr. King asked, "What is the citizen's right of participation in the decisions which so directly affect his community," local black youth in Tifton asked these same kinds of questions. When Dr. King demanded that any social movement he associated with, "be an example by refusing to be complicit in society's depersonalizing of citizens and be a progressive movement that had moral responsibilities," so too were these demands made by the leaders of the Tifton youth movement.[52] Therefore, as the movement in Tifton switched leaders, the philosophy remained intact because the inspirational source behind the movement was the same.

[51] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.
[52] Stewart Burns, *To the Mountaintop: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Sacred Mission to Save America, 1955-1968*, 1st ed (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 343.

The sudden shift in strategies is unclear. Dykes suggested that the change was due to the fact that Wright was much more militant than he had been, but neither newspapers nor other participants confirm the difference in the leaders' temperaments. However, they do report that Wright believed that the movement in Tifton had to be more confrontational, so direct-action was employed under his leadership.[53] Nowhere was direct action more utilized than at Wilson and Industrial because the inequalities were so pervasive. Furthermore, the data suggest that Wright appeared to be more of a cerebral leader. He knew the social customs of Tifton as well as their laws. He informed his classmates of city ordinances that were very important to their cause. For example, Tifton had an ordinance, according to Terrell, that no one could protest inside the city limits. He described how they organized the marches. "We couldn't march in the city. The city had orders against marches and parades, so there were never major permits, so we always had to stay outside the city limits. We always had to stay south of 17th street and we had to walk across the street. That was their rule then and we put up with that, to keep people informed because Major was very informed."[54] In addition to Wright being informed, he understood, like Dkyes, that pushing for resource equity between black and white schools was not a good strategy because they did not have the numbers to have an effective boycott. So along with planned marches, he decided to continue to employ similar tactics used by his predecessor which was sporadic protest.

[53] A section on the scholarship that discussed how movements decided what tactic to employ needs to be added here.

[54] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012. Terrell also noted how white Tiftonians honored the picketing of black students. He stated, "Whites saw us on 17th Street and they had to go down on Phyllisburg, they would just turn around. They wouldn't just go across the picket line."

Instead of hosting meetings and coming up with a plan, Mr. Wright would instruct students to meet at the library, the swimming pool, bus station, or any other place that black taxes help fund but they were not able to use. Mr. Terrell remembered participating in a number of these kinds of protests and how effective they were. He stated, "the library was down under the health department downtown, so we went to the library before they could announce we were going to the library. Then [we were suppose] to go the  swimming pool but we didn't go to the swimming pool but we did end up at the library and when the lady at the library saw us coming in the door, the director [said] loudly, 'The niggas are here!' That was then and the next time we went to the Greyhound bus station."[55]

After a number of sporadic protests occurred in Tifton, local officials realized that a movement was brewing. Along with being concerned with the small yet frequent youth protests that were occurring in Tifton, they worried about nearby social movements taking place throughout southwest Georgia, specifically Albany. Unwilling to sacrifice its reputation as a "Friendly City," Tifton both wanted to quell youth activism and avoid the chances of white violence escalating. Tifton officials attempted to keep both sides happy by making enough small concessions to satisfy black Tiftonians without addressing their core concerns, which would have made white Tiftonians restless. For example, they built a gymnasium for blacks to use, Mott-Litman, but the gym was not on school grounds nor was it on par with what whites had across town.  Furthermore, "they didn't want to [build

[55] Ibid.

us a] swimming pool, according to Mr. Terrell, but they did. They didn't want us to come over to their white schools to play in the gym so they built one."[56]

Tifton officials conceding on certain grievances articulated by black youth as a way to avoid addressing their primary concern was not an abnormality. Pertilla and Dkyes suggested that these concessions made by local officials were not out of the ordinary. In fact, they made similar concessions when Dkyes was the leader of the student movement. They stated, "White people tried to diffuse [the movement]. Their tactic was more of concession rather than confrontation and they got rid of one of the so-called hard core Klu Klux Klan [members in town] because they said we've got good neighbors and we've got good relationships [with the black community]. They didn't want us to come all the way."[57] Despite the fact that local officials in Tifton made small compromises, the youth movement did not lose momentum. If anything, the concessions emboldened more youth to participate because they saw that the sporadic protests performed by their peers worked. Although black youth did not immediately gain access to the library or the bus station, they were able to get local officials to build a gymnasium and a swimming pool. While black youth were thrilled with the concessions made by local officials they understood that a new gym and a new swimming pool did not end the struggle. As they continued to enter into Industrial and Wilson they realized that sporadic protest would change their educational experiences. Therefore, they would have to devise a plan that would directly address the educational inequities they faced constantly.

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[56] Ibid.

[57] Pertilla, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012; Dykes, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, March 16, 2012.

## A Need for Direct Action

Black schools after *Brown* continued to be one of the great paradoxes of segregation. On one hand it was a viable place for black students to learn and be treated with respect, but on the other hand it served as a constant reminder of what they had to go without and why their schools did not have the resources that nearby white schools possessed. For example, the protest that occurred at Wilson was based primarily on what black youth perceived as unfair. According to an article published in the *New York Times Magazine*, "students picketed and generally protested the fact that the money needed to build a gymnasium or to buy a typewriter for Wilson had somehow ended up on the other side of town, where the whites had just built themselves an ultramodern high school with a warm, spacious gym."[58] Terrell noted that the protesters were concerned about the lack of resources at Wilson but they were just as concerned with the deplorable conditions at Industrial. He noted, "The protest included conditions at Wilson and at Industrial."[59]

Black youth in Tifton were angry about having to go without while their white counterparts had an abundance of resources. Besides not having "sewing machines in the homemaking department" and only six typewriters for 500 students to share, the conditions at Industrial were deteriorating. The conditions were so bad at Industrial, according to an investigation by the NAACP, "the school structure itself was condemned and labeled unsafe [in 1958]."[60] Frustrated by decades of inequality and inspired by the events taking place in Albany, Georgia, the youth movement evolved from registering people to vote to walking out of school and demanding full citizenship by means of equal resources. Young black Tiftonians definitely adopted "three simple words" Dr. King

[58] Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 37.
[59] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.
[60] "Georgia Students Appeal Unequal Facilities," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 28, 1962.

described "as the nature of the social movement . . . All, now, and here. We want all of our rights and we want them here and now."[61] Black students in Tifton who were involved in the movement felt a kinship with organizations and leaders who called for an immediate end to inequality because most of them were motivated by the movement's urgency. Therefore, it is not surprising that six months after the youth movement started in Tifton they were in the streets directly confronting the status quo.

In the fall of 1962, the youth movement in Tifton was still in its embryonic stage. However, the synergy that surrounded the movement could not be denied. Wright, along with other youth leaders, was able to raise the conscious level of his classmates which resulted in more youth becoming activists. As school began, the message was clear and concise. Black youth wanted the same types of resources found at nearby white schools. Once they realized that the school board had no intentions of allocating tax dollars evenly, the protest was inevitable. Led by Wright, 300 black students walked out of Wilson High on "a Friday morning in October." Knowing that it was no way to prevent that many students from leaving, Principal Mack "stood in the doorway, arms folded against his chest, eyes focusing on one after another . . . as nearly half the students thundered out of the front door and into the street."[62] They walked out of school with hopes of bringing attention to the conditions under which they were forced to learn. According to the *Daily Defender*, the youth wanted more resources for their school because "their school building houses approximately 1,200," so the school was overcrowded.[63] In addition to school lacking specific resources, and being overcrowded,

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[61] "King Warns Negroes of Token Integration Move," *Tifton Gazette*, April 3, 1962, 4.
[62] Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 37.
[63] "Georgia Students Appeal Unequal Facilites"; Daily Defender, "Rural Ga. Area Pupils Walk Out For Better School," *Daily Defender*, October 23, 1962; "2,500 Students Stay Out In May-Spencer Boycott,"

the *Atlanta Daily World* reported that "there is no playground equipment for the elementary school children" at Industrial and the students at Wilson remained without a gymnasium.[64] While the NAACP investigated the youth complaints, Mrs. Mercedes Wright—Youth Advisor for the NAACP in Georgia—noted that "mass picketing and other demonstrations are being carried out."[65]

Officials from the Tift County School board faced a dilemma because if they refused to address black youth grievances then the protest would continue. If they addressed the concerns raised by black youth then that disrupted the racially progressive narrative that Tifton attempted to portray. Black youth learned, from surrounding movements, that school board members had to explain why 300 students were marching in the streets. In addition to explaining why students were out, they had to explain why the students did not plan to go back to school. When the protest began, the superintendent of Tift County described the protest "as a disciplinary matter and should be dealt with by the principal of the school."[66] However, the superintendent could not suppress the facts which were this was a protest about resources and he, along with the white citizens of Tifton, had to come to terms that the youth in Tifton were not just going to go away.

The school board's initial response was to palliate over the issues raised by black youth. Shortly after the students walked-out of Wilson High, Tifton's superintendent was

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*Daily Defender*, February 15, 1968; Special to the Daily Defender, "Students Plan City School's Boycott," *Daily Defender*, February 26, 1968. Black schools in the South were not the only schools that dealt with poor conditions and overcrowding. Several articles discussed how the lack of resources led to issues like overcrowding and how black youth responded to the issues using very similar methods.

[64] "Georgia Students Appeal Unequal Facilites."

[65] Ibid.

[66] "35 At Wilson High Protest Inequality," *Atlanta Daily World*, October 9, 1962.

quoted saying, "is there ever any school that could not use more than it has?"[67] On the surface, the rhetorical question posed by the superintendent appears to be valid. However, the question was disingenuous because school officials knew that black schools operated without basic resources. Furthermore, the superintendent's response implied that all of the schools in Tifton had similar resources and everyone was vying for more but that could not have been the case because the social norms in Tifton did not operate on a separate but equal system. The educational system operated on a separate and unequal basis so suggesting black youth walked-out of school to get more as if the more was a want and not a need minimized the purpose for the protest. As was the case in the 1950s, white politicians and school officials tended to downplay the educational realities of black students in an effort to portray black youth responses as an overreaction. Therefore, the superintendent tried to couch the boycott in terms of students wanting more is not a surprise.

Black youth understood the customs of Tifton so they did not spend a lot of time trying to decode rhetorical questions because they knew the reality of the situation. Nor did they spend a great deal of time trying to convince school officials that a boycott was warranted and needed. When Wright reflected on the boycott he stated, "Individuals were never really the issue or the targets of the movement. It was the system, the ante-bellum system of the South that we were at odds with."[68] In other words, those who attended Wilson and Industrial knew that the superintendent's failure to address their concerns was part of the problem but it was not the origin of the disparities. The reason black schools were "without a lunch room and didn't have a proper place to fix the lunch for the

[67] Ibid., 3.
[68] Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 38.

children and had to transfer [students] from Industrial to Wilson just to eat" had little to do with the superintendent.[69] This does not negate the superintendent's role in perpetuating an unjust system but it illuminates how the walk-out moved beyond the realm of attacking individuals, who perpetuated the status quo, to directly attacking a system that demeaned them as citizens.

There is no evidence suggesting that the Tift County School Board had plans on improving the structural conditions at Industrial and providing newer books at Wilson until black youth walked out and the media began covering the event. Terrell stated that the walk-out was the only way to get white school officials to acknowledge the conditions of black schools. Even though they were not able to get all of the students out, enough students walked-out which received the attention of black newspapers, such as *The Atlanta Daily World* and *The Daily Defender*. The events taking place in Tifton were covered by these media sources for over a month. The media coverage, along with the NAACP's investigation, meant that school officials had a very difficult time portraying the walk-out using political rhetoric. Political rhetoric could not explain the "broken doors and broken window panes at Industrial." Nor could it explain the lack of new books at Wilson and the fact the students did not have a playing field. The walk-out, in combination with the media coverage, forced school officials to switch their strategy from palliating to compromising.

The tactic employed by the youth in Tifton succeeded because they were able to improve the conditions at Industrial and Wilson. Mr. Terrell remembered "they started to give us [new] books. They started to put in the panes in the windows; they started fixing

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[69] Terrell, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Tifton, Georgia, July 21, 2012.

the door where you could lock them. [They] went back and redid the lunchroom." He also stated that "new pavement was put down."[70] Although black youth would not get all of the resources they demanded until years later, they received a majority of improvements because of the walk-out. To a degree, Mr. Terrell was correct about the walk-out being the only way to get the attention of the school board. Initially the switch to direct-action seemed beneficial to the movement but participants in the movement soon realized the price of demanding equality.

## The Backlash

Although white school and political officials had a difficult time controlling the young segment of the black community, they were able to keep most of the older population from supporting the youth. Even in a genteel place like Tifton, whites had their way of penalizing those who challenged the status quo. Young black Tiftonians were not susceptible to the same terror as young blacks in Albany. So youth had little fear in Tifton. Also, they were confident that public officials in Tifton would not stoop to those kinds of measures because they were so image conscious. For the most part, the students were right. However, they were not prepared for how school and political officials started to publicly and privately threaten the older black community.

Threats for supporting the youth movement began and parents who allowed their children to participate were subjected to termination. A movement that had little adult support anyway began to see even less support. Terrell noted that, at the height of the walk-out, only Reverend Rockwell, Deacon Horne, Mr. Nixon, and a few others were willing to support their cause. He stated, "The adults started to move away from us

[70] Ibid.

[because we] were drawing too much attention."[71] During a time when the movement needed more support, the authorities tried to stifle the movement by penalizing the participants' parents.

The greatest strength of the movement in Tifton was also its greatest weakness. Mr. Wright had been given the reins of leadership because he was one of the few youth qualified to organize and lead an effective movement. Wright took his role seriously and was effective. Within two months, he had organized several spontaneous protests and a walk-out that forced school officials to adhere to some of the demands articulated by black students. However, he also became the face of the movement so when white officials wanted to deal an indelible blow, they knew who to target.

As the walk-out came to an end and improvements in the schools began to materialize, Wright was expelled from school for "leading a student delegation seeking better conditions."[72] An uproar ensued from the students at Wilson, so the walk-out that started off being about the conditions of their schools now incorporated the unfair treatment of their young leader. According to the *Atlanta Daily World*, once the students heard of Major Wright's expulsion, half of them walked out.[73] The students were not successful in reversing the expulsion of Mr. Wright. In fact, the expulsion was just the beginning of the backlash. Wright recalled how the momentum of the movement changed suddenly. He wrote, "I was proud and happy. The pride lasted, but not the happiness. The school walkout led to a confrontation with Mr. Mack and white school officials, and I was barred from finishing my senior year—barred from all the schools in the state of

[71] Ibid.
[72] "Georgia Students Appeal Unequal Facilites," A1 , col. 3.
[73] Ibid

Georgia for a year, maybe longer."[74] In addition to Wright being expelled from Wilson, white officials were willing to break the custom of gentility to see him forced out of Georgia. Mr. Wright stated, "Crosses were burned, there were threats. So one night in November, fearing for [my grandparent's lives] I left [their] home in Brookfield . . . I fled to safety. . . and a few months later I fled Georgia all together."[75] While the movement did not abruptly end with Major Wright being forced out of town, the movement slowed nearly to a standstill. Although Tifton had to speed up their slow implementation of *Brown*, the struggle for equality suffered a great deal when Wright was barred from the state.

[74] Obatala, "Back Home in Tifton: Was the Civil-Rights Struggle Worth It?," 94.
[75] Ibid

# Chapter 4

## "We Were Trying to Just Be:" Black Youth Participation in the Americus Movement

According to the *Daily Tifton Gazette*, Americus and Sumter County led the way in refusing federal government mandates. The article stated, "The Americus and Sumter school systems announced that they would refuse to comply with the new rules issued by the U.S. Office of Education. . . [both] will face a loss of federal funds unless they file compliance forms by the May 6th deadline."[1] As an explanation to why Americus and Sumter County systems refused the federal mandate, the superintendent—Edward N. Bailey—stated "we feel the guidelines go further than the requirements of the law. We have done everything to fulfill the freedom of choice requirements for pupils."[2] Although Mr. Bailey's response to federal mandates was a typical white southern response in the mid-1960s, by the early 1970s the southern response had changed and towns like Americus were elevated as the ideal place of what true desegregation looked like.

On February 12, 1971, *Life* published an article, "Discovering One Another in a Georgia Town" depicting how race relations in Americus, Georgia had improved since the upheaval of the 1960s. Centered on integration, the author—Marshall Frady—argued that "for all the continuing scattered incidents of rear-guard viciousness, what is under way in communities like Americus . . . [is] resolution.[3] While major cities like Chicago, New York, and Boston were still trying to find their way through the malaise of integration in the early and mid-1970s, Frady suggested that Americus accomplished this

[1] "Americus and Sumter Schools Are First in Georgia to Refuse to Follow Federal Guidelines," *The Daily Tifton Gazette*, April 13, 1966.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Marshall Frady, "Discovering One Another in Georgia Town: In the Schools Americus, Black and White Youngsters Have Started Building a Common Future," *Life*, February 12, 1971, 46D.

feat seamlessly by 1971.[4] As evidence, she noted that blacks and whites now attended football games together, played on the same field, and occupied the same classrooms. Citizens of Americus accepted desegregation and tried to make black youth feel welcomed at Americus High by incorporating culturally relevant materials. Frady posited:

> In the Americus school system's administrative offices . . . there are displays of black studies programs, including pamphlets of Martin Luther King and Dred Scott and Frederick Douglass, as well as brochures entitled *Racism in America*. . . In one English classroom . . . there is a poster of James Baldwin, with a quote from his work: 'It is a terrible and inexorable law that one cannot deny the humanity of another without diminishing one's own.[5]

Careful of being too nostalgic, Frady declared that a number of racial ideologies and practices remained after integration.

An ideal that persisted was the belief that black students brought the academic integrity of the school down. Therefore, black students were constantly tracked into lower and industrial level classes. Although the author attempted to palliate over this practice, she does admit that "a program of instructional levels . . . has tended to pitch more blacks than whites into the slower classes."[6] Another practice that remained was the fear from white adults who believed black males had an uncontrollable desire for white females. As a result, white teachers and parents were the social and academic buffers. While at

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[4] For works that discussed desegregation outside the South, see Elizabeth Todd-Breland, "'To Reshape and Redefine Our World' : African American Political Organizing for Education in Chicago, 1968-1988," Dissertation (The University of Chicago, 2010); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s*, 2nd ed. (The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Dionne Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organization in the Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2002); Professor Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (Yale University Press, 2004).

[5] Frady, "Discovering One Another in Georgia Town: In the Schools Americus, Black and White Youngsters Have Started Building a Common Future," 46D.

[6] Frady, "Discovering One Another in Georgia Town: In the Schools Americus, Black and White Youngsters Have Started Building a Common Future."

school, teachers tried to limit the social interactions by hastening the students to class when they witnessed a black and white student socializing. Outside of school, white parents tried to make sure social gatherings remained "private," which meant little socialization took place off school grounds. Some white parents removed their children altogether by enrolling them in private schools.[7]

Although Frady noted that Americus still had to deal with racial issues that plagued the town for decades, her article concluded by quoting the Mayor of Americus, Frank Myers. "It's gonna be our children finally who're going to deliver us out of this thing that's been going on down here ever since slavery. They the ones who'll do it. . ."[8] While Frady's conclusion about youth delivering Americus from a racist past is correct, the implication that white and black youth were mutual in this deliverance is inaccurate. By 1971, white youth had to adjust to a status quo that black youth had fought to change for nearly a decade. By the 1970s, Americus was a different place because of the sacrifices made by black youth and civil rights organizations, like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).

The federal government was very influential in forcing places like Americus to come to terms with a different reality because of the federal resources that were poured into the county. In the mid-1960s, Americus received $161,152.00 from the federal

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[7] Frady stated, "When it was obvious that total school integration was at hand for these citizens, there was a minor but noticeable evacuation of some administrators and teachers out of the Americus School System, and they were accompanied by about 375 students. Private schools multiplied over the area like an overnight backyard visitation of mushrooms." For information on how whites used flight as a response to integration see Ibid.; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

[8] Frady, "Discovering One Another in Georgia Town: In the Schools Americus, Black and White Youngsters Have Started Building a Common Future," 52D.

government; whereas, Sumter County received $296,699.00.[9] During this period, the United States Department of Housing, Education, and Welfare (HEW) had the authority to withhold public funds from school districts that refused to comply with the law. However, even though the federal government's push for compliance was an important component for blacks in Americus to achieve some form of educational equality, the federal government's scope was too narrow in that it only focused on integration. By the time the Civil Rights Movement made it to Americus in the early 1960s, by way of the Albany and Sumter County Movements, several things were clear: (1) a number of black youth were ready and excited to join and (2) integration was not their chief concern.

Black youth in Americus were motivated by a right to just be. They wanted to be treated fairly; they wanted to be treated like citizens. In other words, they wanted the same thing their white counterparts had which was the ability to enjoy life as children and adolescents. Black youth had to constantly deal with educational and social injustices which fundamentally affected crucial periods of their lives. As Wilma King noted, "the inhospitable environment that a number of black youth experienced gave rise to mass action."[10] Therefore, the study of the Americus Movement is primarily about how a number of black youth decided to fight for a society that would value and appreciate their humanity. It also illuminates how a number of whites were unyielding in their belief that blacks were permanent second-class citizens. As a consequence, a number of black youth suffered in challenging those beliefs.

Black youth in the Americus Movement in 1962, such as Sam Mahone, Sandra Mansfield, Lorena Sabba, Juanita Wilson, and others assiduously marched, sang, bled,

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[9] "Americus and Sumter Schools Are First in Georgia to Refuse to Follow Federal Guidelines."
[10] Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights*, First Edition (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 6.

and nearly died to be treated as first-class citizens in a place that was determined to deny them that right. In a town where race relations were already tenuous, the Americus Movement challenged traditions that were established in the 19th century. That challenge would come by way of the Americus Movement, which essentially depicted how tragedy and triumph often share the same space. The same students who experienced the tragedy of not having their humanity recognized became agents for change in ways that fundamentally altered the social norms in Americus, Geogia.

**Background**

Americus was established in 1832 as a small courthouse town. By the late 1800s, it became known as the "Metropolis of Southwest, Georgia." Americus received this name because it had a privately financed railroad system and was known as a key distributor of cotton. In addition to flourishing financially, Americus had a number of attractions, particularly the Victorian Windsor Hotel, which lured northeasterners to visit. According to Alan Anderson, Americus had political and social clout at the close of the 19th century and at the dawn of the 20th century that brought the likes of Henry Grady, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ty Cobb to town.[11] During the 1900s, this metropolis remained very influential politically and socially which had a profound influence on race relations in Southwest Georgia.

Unlike Tifton, Americus did not tout itself as a genteel and quiet place. Therefore, the pretentiousness that existed in Tifton did not occur in Americus. Americus' traditions were born during the antebellum period so overt practices of white supremacy and black inferiority remained well into the 20th century. Refusing to hide

[11] Alan Anderson, *Remembering Americus, Georgia: Essays on Southern Life* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2006); Alan Anderson, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 15, 2012, March 15, 2012.

under the guise of racial progress, race relations in the town were frozen in time. Although decades removed from the antebellum period, blacks in Americus remained excluded from the political process and had very limited economic opportunities that afforded them social mobility. However, the sector that blacks were not excluded from was education. As compulsory education was embraced in Americus, blacks did have access to formal, albeit separate, education as early as the 1880s.

According to Alan Anderson, Sumter County genealogists, Americus adopted compulsory education in 1879. All of Americus' children had access to some type of formal education. Formal education for blacks began in church schools but they received their own school building, McCay Hill School, in 1884. Within the educational sphere, Americus may have been viewed as a racially progressive town after the antebellum period but by the early 1900s the educational system was not progressive. Although McCay Hill was built in the early 1880s, it remained the only school for black children until 1935. Furthermore, by the 20th century, the school board constantly addressed the educational concerns (i.e. overcrowding, school's proximity, and older and younger children being grouped together) of white parents, while ignoring those of black parents. For example, when a group of prominent black businessmen petitioned the school board regarding the fact that "all 900 black students attended one school; small children [having to attend the same school] with older children after having traversed considerable distances to get there; a lack of janitorial services . . . no school auditorium . . . general overcrowding, sometimes a seventy-four pupil-teacher ratio," most of their issues were disregarded by the board.[12] The only concession made by the board was to add another

[12] Anderson, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 15, 2012"; Anderson, "Americus School History."

grade which did little to address the concerns of the black community in Americus. One can reasonably surmise that the educational access blacks received in Americus after the antebellum period began to stagnate around the early 1900s and did not improve much in the following decades of the twentieth century. [13]

Blacks in Americus could not help but notice the second-class nature of their educational opportunities because the opposition was so overt. For example, when A.S. Staley High School was built for black youth in 1935, the board refused to contribute financially.[14] Even though the other black school, McCay, had worsened by 1941 to the point where "the conditions had deteriorated so badly that the Junior Chamber of Commerce noted . . . primitive outdoor plumbing, stairways with no railing, an inadequate two-room soup kitchen and nonexistent playground."[15] When the school board finally built an elementary school for blacks—Eastview—in 1956, the former courthouse town's ethos was already established.

These racial views about educational differences, which developed over time, profoundly shaped race relations in Americus. Consequently, by the 1950s, the educational customs of Americus were non-negotiable. The school-board operated a dual system with the understanding that the city was responsible for educating white students and the county was responsible for educating blacks. When federal cases attempted to remove systematic barriers, public officials in Americus sought to reinforce systematic

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[13] Read William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (Teachers College Press, 2001); James D Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[14] Anderson, "Americus School History."

[15] Ibid., 7. Anderson stated that the financial support for the building of Staley came from "the Federal Emergency Relief Act . . . and preliminary construction work [was] done under the Works Progress Administration."

barriers. Whites in this part of southwest Georgia had grown accustomed to their way of life and any challenge to their way of life was met with stauch opposition.

### Challenging the Boundaries

Before the Americus Movement of the 1960s, one of the most noticeable organizations that challenged the racial customs of Americus was the Koinonia Farm. Founded in Sumter County, a couple of miles outside of Americus, in 1942 by two Baptist ministers—Martin England and Clarence Jordan—the organization sought to bring racial harmony to southwest Georgia. Aware of the racial customs, members of Koinonia sought to use Christianity as a way to remove those systemic bearers they believed went against the teachings of Jesus Christ. According to Tracy K'Meyer, the "Koinonia Farm was an attempt to build [a] beloved community. . . They sought to achieve [this] by bringing whites and blacks together in work, through cooperation and equalized economic conditions." [16] In other words, this organization sought to challenge and reshape the ways a number of whites thought about themselves religiously, racially, and economically. Purposefully or unintentionally, the simple creation of the organization attacked the core values of the region. White citizens of Sumter County did not accept its intrusion passively.

During the first decade of the organization's inception, the members were able to live without incident in rural Georgia. In fact, K'Meyer noted that "in the mid-1950s Koinonia lived a quiet life in an uneasy but peaceful coexistence with the local people." Furthermore, K'Meyer noted that the coexistence that the members had with local people could be explained by their lack of outwardly demonstrating their opposition to

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[16] Tracy Elaine K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 6.

segregation or discrimination. She stated that "Koinonians did not believe in making a scene, using the courts, or agitating for legal measures that would advance racial equality"[17] They differentiated from other civil rights organizations because they chose to fight for racial equality and social harmony inwardly. Members of the organization used their farm as a space where their ideals and customs could be discussed and practiced. While Koinonia's subtle, yet successful, ways of challenging the boundaries of Americus went without incident for over a decade, by the late 1950s it experienced the full magnitude of white opposition.

The Koinonia Farm isolated display of racial harmony eventually met opposition. Stephen Tuck stated, "A Ku Klux Klan terror campaign of bombing and sabotage, starting in the summer of 1956. . . clergyman from across the country volunteered to patrol Koinonia's grounds. In July, a dynamite attack destroyed Koinonia's roadside market. Six months later, vandals chopped down over three hundred fruit trees."[18] Outside of the physical violence, a newsletter written to the NAACP suggested that the economic drawback was more severe. It stated, "more devastating than either the bombing or the shooting was the announcement last week by the Citizens Bank of

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[17] Ibid., 81–82.

[18] Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (University of Georgia Press, 2003); K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South*; Thelma Hunt Shirley, "How It All Started In Americus, Ga.: Part 1," *Chicago Daily Defender (Daily Edition) (1960-1973)*, August 9, 1965; Numan V. Bartley, "Race Relations and the Quest for Equality," in *A History of Georgia*, 2nd ed. (The University of Georgia Press, n.d.), 361–374. Numan Bartley suggested the increase violence at Koinonia Farm was in large part due to the passage of *Brown*. Similarly, K'Meyer's work stated "in the late 1950s, Koinonians became the target of violence, legal harassment, intimidation, and economic boycott. As civil rights became more of a national issue, Koinonia's interracial activity drew attention and anger." The justification whites in Sumter County used to perpetuate violent acts against the Koinonia According to Shirley's article, the farm was labeled as being "run by people from 'up-North Communistic ideas.'" The article went on to note that the farm was established by " a group from Ridgewood, [New Jersey as a place] where whites and blacks lived together and as quickly as this was discovered, bullets began flying through the night and a roadside pecan stand operated by the group was blown to bits."

Americus that it would not make further loans to Koinonia Farm. This bank has supplied Koinonia with operating capital since the beginning here in 1942 . . . so at writing, our Market is riddled with bullets, we have no operating capital and we have 2-3 weeks' supply."[19]

Even though Koinonia survived the physical destruction and the economic slump, it is plausible that the destruction of the farm was not the primary objective. The events that transpired in Americus, in the late 1950s, was intended to send a message to the region that southwest Georgia would not tolerate anyone challenging their racial boundaries even if it was a white-Christian pacifist organization that did not employ common civil rights' tactics (i.e. registering people to vote, boycotts, and sit-ins). The events that transpired at Koinonia Farm became the strategy adopted by those who wanted the status quo in Americus to remain. The primary goal was to paralyze those who were displeased with the social, political, and economical ethos of Americus from challenging the town's customs. Even though the Ku Klux Klan is often credited for being the executors of fierce opposition, ordinary white citizens of Americus and Sumter County were key contributors as well.

While white opposition was successful in creating numerous obstacles for those who decided to challenge boundaries, it could not prevent the wave of activism taking place in southwest Georgia because, as K'Meyer suggested, the Koinonia Farm survived. According to K'Meyer and Tuck, the survival of the Koinonia Farm illustrated that even though white opposition was fierce and presented a number of challenges, it was not an

[19] National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *NAACP Youth File. General Department File. [Herbert L. Wright]*, 1–2.

impenetrable force. The survival of Koinonia was important because as Tuck stated "it provided a base that was relatively a safe haven."[20]

Besides the Koinonia Farm, other factors led to civil unrest in Americus. One influential factor was the Albany Movement. Whites in Albany were just as oppositional to change as whites in Americus. If blacks in Albany could fight to improve their circumstances, so could blacks in Americus. In essence, Albany was a morale booster for those who lived in Americus. Another factor that contributed was an increase in havens.

In Americus, there were three prominent black families—the Freemans, Campbells, and Barnums—who openly offered their churches and places of business as headquarters for the movement. Tuck summed it up this way, "The size of Americus relative to the region allowed the emergence of an indigenous group of black leaders independent of white control," which meant that they did not have to fear the economic backlash that even Koinonia was susceptible to.[21] In addition to the Albany Movement and the increase in havens, the insurrection trial greatly increased the activism in Americus because it galvanized those in the black community and some in the white community as well.

Sam Mahone, a native of Americus, Georgia and member of SNCC, recalled how a sedition trial propelled Americus into national significance because of the implication the case had on the Civil Rights Movement. Mahone noted that "Americus probably ranks along with Selma, Alabama, Montgomery, and Birmingham in terms of the historic

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[20] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 178.
[21] Ibid., 177; Wilson, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012." Mrs. Juanita Wilson is the daughter of Reverend R.L. Freedman and she vividly remembers her father church being used for Civil Rights activities. She also noted that her father was originally from Atlanta and a graduate of Morehouse College. Reverend Freeman was heavily influenced by Martin Luther King Sr. which gives some insight to why he was receptive to civil rights organizations coming to Americus.

quarters of the movement mainly because of [the insurrection case]."[22] Although the sedition trial and the ruling from the trial proved pivotal to the movement, the events that transpired before the insurrection charges were filed were important as well.

According to the *New York Times* and the *Atlanta Daily World*, a demonstration in the summer of 1962 against segregated public facilities, police brutality, and political disenfranchisement lead to the arrest of hundreds of people in Americus and several SNCC workers. The initial reaction by public officials in Americus was to brutalize the leaders of the movement and set their bail at an astronomically high rate that could not be paid. Based on an article published in the *Atlanta Daily World*, the bail for SNCC workers was set at "43 thousand dollars each."[23] One of the strategies adopted by SNCC was to fill local jails so the high bail was not a major concern initially. The fact that brutality and high bail amounts spawned more demonstrations did not sit well with the powers that be in Americus so a year later they increased the seriousness of the charges. The charges went from a simple misdemeanor to an offense punishable by death.

An article in the *Washington Post* noted that "John Perdew, Zev Aelony, Ralph Allen, and Don Harris—[the four demonstrators arrested for their participation in an anti-segregation march] face insurrection charges which carry a maximum death penalty upon conviction." The article went on to note that the "Georgia prosecutor said yesterday that he has changed his mind and will bring charges of 'inciting an insurrection' [for the]

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[22] Sam Mahone, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012, July 27, 2012; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters : America in the King Years 1954-63*, First Paperback Edition (Simon & Schuster, 1989).

[23] "SNCC Head Hits Alleged Brutality In Americus, Ga.," *Atlanta Daily World (1932-2003)*, August 17, 1963, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/news/docview/491289725/abstract/13B6CC9B50010B7B43F/2?accountid=10747; "5 in Georgia Jail Fight Case Today:U.S. Court to Hear Pleas for Americus Integrationists," *New York Times*, October 31, 1963, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/news/docview/116424380/abstract/13B6CC9B50010B7B43F/14?accountid=10747.

basic reason to deny the defendants bond."[24] It is important to note that the prosecutor was unaware of the severity of the charges but, nevertheless, when he became aware of the severity of the indictment, he did not change the charges. The prosecutor was primarily concerned with how to keep the leaders of the movement in jail so "he exhaustively poured through the law books to find a strong law to keep the young men out of circulation."[25] What began as an arrest for participation in a demonstration in 1962 had turned into a death penalty case by 1963. Although the purpose of bringing such a severe indictment was, as Mahone argued, to stifle the Americus Movement, the charges galvanized the black citizens of Americus and "it ignited the movement.[26]

While the indictment of insurrection was able to elevate the consciousness of those victimized by the social, political, and economic injustices taking place throughout Americus, the case created a moment of uncertainty as well. If participating in a non-violent direct-action protest was insurrection, the primary strategy adopted by local and national movements throughout the country was as well. SNCC, SCLC, and other organizations sent representatives to southwest Georgia because they were concerned that the case could impact a local movement still in its infant stage. SNCC had spent the first three years of the1960s trying to convince locals why they should not be afraid to participate in non-violent direct-action protests and this case gave locals every reason to

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[24] Robert E. Baker, "4 Jailed in Georgia to Face 'Insurrection Trial'," *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, October 22, 1963, A7.

[25] Baker, "4 Jailed in Georgia to Face 'Insurrection Trial'"; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 865–875. Branch's work detailed the origins of the law and why the district attorney in Sumter County chose to charge the four SNCC leaders with insurrection. He stated, "the charges were grounded in what was known as the 'Angelo Herndon statute' after the famous communism/integration show trial of the 1930s, which started Herndon's lawyer, Ben Davis, toward his career in the Communist Party. The state made sedition a capital crime, and the Sumter County solicitor all but openly declared that he filed these particular charges in order to jail the demonstration leaders indefinitely by fiat, as Georgia law permitted no pre-trial release in capital cases.

[26] Mahone, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012."

be afraid. Telling someone that they may be brutalized or jailed was one thing but asking someone to participate in an activity that was punishable by death was very different.

Mahone lived in Americus during this period and remembered vividly the fear and nervousness caused by this case because of the potential consequences it could have on the movement. He said "If they had been successful in finding them guilty, it would have literally stopped movements around the country."[27] Perdew, Aelony, Allen, and Harris were in jail for over 80 days. Outside agencies, like the Kennedy Administration, had to get involved in the case. These events validated the concerns permeating through civil rights organizations, nationally and locally.

Had it not been for the panel of three federal judges who agreed to hear the case, Mahone's conclusion of the movement ending in 1963 is a conceivable one. However, the federal judges did intercede and eventually ruled in favor of those falsely accused of insurrection. On October 31, 1963 the federal judicial panel ruled the jailing/sedition charge was unconstitutional and ordered the immediate release of Perdew, Aelony, Allen, and Harris.[28] Despite the months of uncertainty caused by the case, there were more blacks in Americus participating in different forms of protest during and after the case than before, which suggests that the event contributed to the rise of activism in Americus.

In addition to the factors mentioned above, the increase in black youth participation was another influential factor that contributed to the rise of activism in Americus. As Tuck noted, "It was the presence and attitude of local high school students

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[27] Ibid.

[28] WSB-TV, "WSB-TV Newsfilm Clip of Lawyers for Civil Rights Workers Charged with the Capital Offense of Insurrection, Police and Trial Bystanders in Americus, Georgia, 1963," News (Americus, Georgia, October 31, 1963), WSB-TV Newsfilm Collection, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection; Mahone, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012; Baker, "4 Jailed in Georgia to Face 'Insurrection Trial'."

that fueled the movement."[29] Black youth were vital to the Americus Movement because they could not be controlled by economic factors their parents had to consider. Outside of students joining SNCC, the organization found it difficult to get a number of adults to participate in a number of events because of the economic backlash they faced from their white employers. However, the only method public officials had at their disposal to hinder youth participation was fear. So it is not a surprise that "most of the [demonstrators] were teenagers" when SNCC organized a protest directed at police brutality. Nor is it a surprise the "police used clubs and electirs (sic) prod poles" on the protestors as a means to quell the demonstration and instill fear.[30] Because black youth in Americus were so vital to the movement it is possible that the sedition trial was intended to instill fear in them. An examination of the Americus Movement illuminates how those who participated in any form of protest were not granted leniency, which included young people as well. Even though no youth faced charges of insurrection, they were instrumental in subsiding the fear caused by the case. Whether it was their lack of understanding the severity of the case or a rebellious spirit, the magnitude of the case did not decrease their activism.

Besides being fearless, the other reason youth contributed to the rise of activism was the pragmatic component they brought. For any social movement to be successful, it needed willing and able bodies. Because many blacks in Americus often worked for those who perpetuated the town's racial ethos, SNCC had a difficult time recruiting adults to participate in voter registration drives or demonstrations. In addition to not having enough adult participation to create or sustain a social movement, there was also a void in

[29] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 178.
[30] "SNCC Head Hits Alleged Brutality In Americus, Ga.," 5.

leadership.[31] This issue was addressed in a letter sent to SNCC's headquarters. David Bell and Robert Mants noted that Americus was ripe for a movement but their concern was with the lack of leadership. They stated, "out of years of oppression comes a feeling of dissatisfaction. From dissatisfaction arises leadership. The proper leadership provides organization . . . successful protest leads to the elimination of oppression . . . The black masses in Americus . . . have been systematically kept in a position of degradation . . . politically ignored, socially segregated, economically exploited . . . The result of this oppression, as exhibited in the past few months, has been discontent, and open dissatisfaction. [Yet] a responsible and able leadership has not appeared."[32] While the leadership void critique was valid for adults, SNCC soon found out that the leaders in Americus would look a little different than the ones in Albany and be a little younger.

Unlike Albany, Americus did not have an Albany State University with a bunch of eager college students ready to join the movement at their disposal. However, as Willie Ricks (MuKasa Dada) recalled, the organization did have a bunch of enthusiastic pre-adolescents and teenagers ready to participate. He noted "when the community kids got involved, they took the head and when the young people took it, it became something else."[33] Black youth, like Mahone, Sandra Mansfield, Juanita Freeman (Wilson), Lorena Barnum (Sabbs), and others saw in Americus a town shackled by its racial history and in

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[31] Harris, "SNCC Papers," n.d., King Center. A detailed letter written by Bell and Mants to the headquarters of SNCC discussed the issues they had with finding quality leadership in Americus. They stated, "Deacon Lonnie Evans was chosen president of the Movement. This is perhaps the grossest error ever committed. He is a weak, unimpressive, shy, sheeplike man without the self-confidence to disagree with a four year old. He is a man in his sixties who will address a puny little twenty year old like me as sir. . . To put it short and sweet, he just doesn't have the dynamic leadership characteristics so badly needed here."

[32] "SNCC Papers." Box 42, folder 14

[33] Mukasa Dada, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, February 1, 2012, February 1, 2012. It is important to note that a number of local blacks had a problem with the increase number of black youth participating in the movement because they felt that young people "were too militant, brash, reckless, and disorganized."

desperate need of a transformation. Growing up in Americus, black youth witnessed and experienced the town's refusal to accept blacks as first-class citizens. Wilson stated, "I would sit and watch the KKK march through the street. I have been on my way home and had spit on my face." In fact each participant who was raised in Americus remembered how whites would constantly look for ways—socially, politically, economically, or educationally—to remind you of your second-class status. Therefore, black youth, civil rights organizations, and adults, who eventually joined the Movement, understood that they could not focus on improving one sector of Americus. They had to address political disenfranchisement as well as the educational disparities taking place. Above all, they knew that the political, economic, and educational sectors were all interconnected so improving one without improving the others was futile.

When SNCC arrived in Americus in 1962, they were not shunned by local black adults but they were not welcomed with open arms either. The fact that SNCC was not embraced by the adult community may explain the difficulties the organization experienced initially. Mr. Mahone stated that when SNCC came to Americus he remembered the first meeting being "held outside the county down in the country side [because a number] of ministers were too afraid to let us meet at their churches because there's been a history of church burnings and bombings throughout the entire area so we met in small churches in the country until we were able to meet in churches inside the city."[34] Eventually SNCC moved its operation from the countryside to the city of Americus. Their first goal in Americus was registering African Americans to vote. One of the startling facts in Americus was the low number of blacks who were registered to vote at the beginning of the 1960s. Although there were 6,674 blacks eligible, only 863

[34] Mahone, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012."

were registered.[35] Blacks made up nearly fifty percent of the town's population but their political influence was nil. Given these facts, SNCC and the black youth set up a voter registration drive. Believing that political empowerment was essential, "an intensive voter registration campaign" was employed.

They immediately ran into obstacles. Illiteracy ran rampant throughout Americus and demanded attention.[36] Because the classes and workshops "were taught by local citizens," black youth would prove pivotal in this endeavor. For example, Mr. Mahone remembered assisting in the "citizenship schools" as a youth. He stated, "I joined SNCC as a high school student. I worked primarily on voter registration, public accommodation, and direct action. I helped to set up freedom schools/literacy classes in Americus."[37] According to Bell and Mants, the campaign would be carried out by "canvassing with the help of local students from six to eight hours per day. Friday and Saturday had been set aside as the days to take potential applicants to city hall."[38]

SNCC pushed the voter registration agenda, similar to SCLC in Tifton, with the aid of black students. Black youth understood that political disenfranchisement was just one of many ways to deny a person full citizenship. With so many of their parents barred from voting, it was just as important for adults to obtain voting rights as it was for them to be treated like human beings. Unwilling to accept Americus as it was, their demands became bolder and the fear decreased which resulted in many forms of activism. As black

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[35] "SNCC Papers." Box 42, folder 14

[36] Harris, "SNCC Papers"; Jon Hale, "'The Student as a Force for Social Change': THe Mississippi Freedom Schools and Student Engagement," *Journal of African American History* 96, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 325–347.

[37] Harris, "SNCC Papers."

[38] "SNCC Papers." The newsletter also noted that "due to the high illiteracy rate in Americus [they] propose to set up citizenship schools throughout the city. Literacy and voter registration workshops will be the subject of the schools. The classes will be taught by local citizens."

youth worked with SNCC to acquire voting rights, their demand for human decency, within the social and educational sphere, grew exponentially louder as well.

**The New Same Old**

The educational system in Americus had very similar racial undertones in the 1950s and early 60s as previous decades. Although some black schools were built to address the overcrowding at McCay, the first black school built in Americus, by the 1950s, the racial tenets the school board adopted during the early 1900s remained. Whites in Americus remained staunch opponents to any form of educational improvement that brought any discomfort to them.[39] Their refusal to budge had a profound impact on the educational experiences of black youth. For example, Ann Rhea Walker experienced the dilapidated conditions of McCay. She attended McCay for eight years and, throughout her tenure, dealt with overcrowding, second-hand materials, and hazardous conditions. She was even afraid to go to the restroom. Walker recalled, "The thing that I remember most about it [was the location of the bathroom]. I don't know if you would call it a basement or what, but that's where the bathrooms were and I remember that I was just so very afraid because when you would go down there all the guts of the structure was under there . . . the girls would go down on the east section and the boys was on the west, and it was the most horrible thing for me to go down there and that's what I did for eight years, It terrified me."[40] The fear of going to the restroom was not something isolated to Walker. Sandra Mansfield, who also attended McCay, remembered the horrors of the

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[39] Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 99–108. Roche stated "Businessmen, farmers, educators, and top school administrators one by one came to the witness stand and testified that the third district would educate its own children before it backed down from massive resistance.
[40] Ann Whea Walker, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 16, 2012, March 16, 2012.

bathroom as well. She stated, “It was an old school. It had a basement down there where we had to use the bathroom, it was gross.”[41] These conditions at McCay profoundly shaped their early educational experiences; however, it was not the sum total of their experiences.

When. Walker left McCay, she enrolled at Staley, which was a high school at the time. She recalled her time at Staley as heavenly. She summed up her high school experience this way, “It was an honor to go there and more of an honor to graduate and to be there. To be a part of everything, I was academically a very good student. I was always selected by teachers to do things. I never shall forget we organized the student council.”[42] Another aspect of Walker’s educational experiences at Staley was that she was head of her class. Similar to other black students who attended segregated schools in the South, black schools became somewhat of a cocoon.[43] Within this cocoon, a number of black youth flourished and had an educational experience that they believed was second to none, which was definitely the case for Walker.

Mansfield and Wilson had very similar educational experiences as Walker although they were a few years younger. Wilson’s experience differed slightly because she did not have to experience horrid conditions at McCay because her school career began at Eastview. When Mansfield was asked about her educational experiences she did not go into great detail but she did say that she remembered the teachers being good and that she was “an A and B student.”[44] Wilson, on the other hand, was very detailed about

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[41] Saundra Mansfield, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012, March 17, 2012.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Vivian Gunn Morris, *The Price They Paid: Desegregation in an African American Community* (Teachers College Press, 2002).
[44] Mansfield, “Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012.”

her experiences at Eastview and Staley. While at Eastview, she recalled the recitals and "how [her teachers] made her learn and that black was beautiful." As she entered Staley, she said the philosophy of teaching, loving, and rigor was the same. She stated, "I had a science teacher, Mr. Carter, who gave assignments that were hands on, you know. You knew that was going to be a part of your grade and everybody dreaded it but everybody was looking forward to it. All of us knew that there was so much we had to learn. There were expectations from our teachers, of our classrooms in elementary, junior high, and high school were the same. The courses were just as rigorous."[45] By examining the educational experiences of Walker, Mansfield, and Wilson, it is evident that their experiences were not in complete contrast with the rhetoric of *Brown*. It also illuminates that *Brown* had very little influence on their educational experiences. While each participant remembered the fond activities, they also remembered being exposed constantly to the same familiar discrimination which inevitably reminded them of their second-class status.

Black youth throughout the South had to get used to the new same old method because it was a custom used throughout the South. What were new materials for black youth were old materials for white youth. This tradition profoundly shaped the educational experiences of Mahone, Walker, Mansfield, Wilson, Sabbs, and others students in Americus. As each talked about going to school during the 1950s and 60s, the conversation invariably ended up with them talking about the frustration they felt from receiving white students' old materials. Mahone remembered this practice taking place from elementary school to high school. He stated, "The black schools, all the books we

[45] Juanita Wilson, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012, March 17, 2012.

had somebody else's name in it. So we knew they were passed on to us, so I never had a book without someone else's name in it so you were getting second rate materials constantly."[46] Similar to Mahone's experience, Walker stated,

> Let me tell you about the books . . . I can see them now. They would bring books from the white high schools . . . and . . . they would have dump trucks enter them at our school . . . Yeah in the front yard. . .they would dump them and we would pick them up and take them to the classrooms. Yeah that's how they got them over there. They would dump them and we would get them and the most interesting thing I can remember, we would look in the books and see Sally and Jene and Don and Dan, (laughs) all of those names and that [were] the books we had you know.[47]

Knowing their new books were old white students' books was humiliating enough, but the dumping of the books in the front of the school like they were trash was downright demeaning. Mansfield stated that her experience at Staley was parallel to Mahone and Walker. In addition to having similar experiences as those who attended the same school, her experience was analogous to Johnny Terrell, Walter Dykes, and Alton Pertilla. She remembered the names in her books and she talked about how the books oftentimes were missing pages from them, which affected their ability to complete homework assignments.[48] Besides the practical sense of how the custom affected the educational experiences of black youth, there was a psychological aspect that Wilson remembered existed. She said, "I think part of it was when we got our books, we got our books with the white folks name in it. . . They had the books for five years then we had to use it for the next five. When they got new books, we got their books. That's second

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[46] Mahone, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012."
[47] Walker, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 16, 2012."
[48] Mansfield, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012"; Sabbs, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012." Mrs. Sabbs remembered "always [being] number six, seven, or 8 down the line of having own this book.

class. . . Just think about being and you couldn't see being."[49] Similar to the youth struggle in Tifton, black youth in Americus had to find a way, physically and mentally, to maintain their belief that they were citizens and were entitled to the same resources afforded to their white counterparts.

As in other locations, the *Brown* decision did very little for black youth in Americus in the decade or so after its passage. In fact, Ms. Walker is the only participant that remembered *Brown* being discussed in any great detail and that was when she went off to college—Morris Brown—in 1955. Therefore, the reality of black education in Americus was that it was unequal in every way imaginable. Wilson summed it up this way, "You didn't have a basketball court, you had a concrete slab outside. You didn't have anything."[50] The effect that white opposition had on black education was definitely seen in the ways black schools operated compared to white schools. For example, Sabbs' mother—Mrs. Barnum—taught at Sumter and her father—Mr. John L. Barnum—had to buy the microscope for her to teach biology whereas white schools were provided microscopes.[51] Likewise, Mahone remembered his graduation being hosted in a church because his school did not have a place to host the ceremonious occasion.

Inherent white opposition created a climate that resulted in black schools being grossly underfunded. Therefore, black youth understood that their educational reality was not going to change unless they responded. *Brown* was foreign to the black youth in Americus. Walker says she does not remember hearing it discussed in detail until she went off to college in 1955 at Morris Brown. But they could see what was going on

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[49] Wilson, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012."
[50] Ibid.
[51] Lorena Sabbs, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012, March 5, 2012.

around them were not. They knew of Little Rock, the Greensboro demonstrations, and the student movements taking place in Albany and Atlanta. A number of them had already begun to participate in the movement brewing in Americus. Mahone, Mansfield, Wilson, and Sabbs understood their educational realities, and as the Movement came to Americus, they knew they would try to fundamentally change those realities.

### A Different Focus but a Similar Struggle

While undoubtedly troubled by the educational customs of Americus, a number of black youth were propelled to act because of how blacks were treated. Rather it was the educational sector or the political or social sector, black youth were frustrated. Their focus on treatment did not trump the goals of achieving political, social, and educational equality; it unified it. They believed that the failure of whites to recognize and treat them as human beings lay at the center of the inequities they faced. Members of SNCC, who resided in Americus at the time, agreed that the social, educational, and political issues were interconnected but an overarching theme would have to be established in order to make the movement relevant to all blacks, young and old, in Americus.

A letter sent by Harris of SNCC shows the intersection of social inequities and education issues. The letter stated that after a local theater was closed, "local Negroes must travel 25 to 40 miles to attend a movie. The staff in Americus feels that a program channeled toward movies, educational as well as recreational, could be valuable in aiding the move and serving as an activity for young people to become involved during the summer."[52] Therefore, their parents' political disenfranchisement, their educational reality, and the lack of social amenities all dealt with some form of mistreatment. For example, Mansfield's involvement in the Americus movement depicts how treatment

[52] Harris, "SNCC Papers." Box 96, folder 10

encapsulated her decision to join when she stated that multiple forms of mistreatment were the reason. An incident she remembered vividly was one in which she was at the store with her mother and her cousin and it was a "picture of a little black doll painted like a black Sambo. This little white lady said oh [referring to Mansfield's cousin] looks like him [referring to the picture] and my mama sealed her lip . . . I thought to myself my mama would never have to go through nothing like that again."[53] So at the age of twelve, Mansfield, like so many other youth in Americus, decided to attack the mistreatment directly.

During the summer of 1963, black youth realized that demanding any change to the status quo would be dealt with violently. As black youth marched downtown, they were met by a white mob, which included law enforcement and members of the Ku Klux Klan, where things got real violent.[54] A number of students were beaten, then arrested and thrown in jail where they spent days and some months under deplorable conditions. A notarized letter from Henrietta Fuller described the conditions to which some were subjected. She stated, "I am 13 years old and in Leesburg Stockade from August 31 to September 8. There were 32 kids in there with me. There were no beds, no mattress, no blankets, pillows, no sheets. . . The hamburgers were dry and were not cooked. . . The smell of waste material was bad."[55] A special report in *Essence* published by Donna

[53] Mansfield, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012."
[54] For more information on this incident and the Stolen Girls read Donna Owens, "Stolen Girls," *Essence*, June 2006; "Freedom Is Not Free: 45 Days in Leesburg Stockade ; a Civil Rights Story: Amazon.co.uk: Lulu Westbrooks-Griffin: Books," accessed August 17, 2012, http://www.amazon.co.uk/Freedom-not-free-Leesburg-Stockade/dp/B0006R7GAE.
[55] Fuller, "SNCC Paper." Box 95, folder 11

Owens also noted that, "everyone had lost weight . . . others had suffered from a range of ills: ear infections, boils, and high fevers. Some had lice in their hair."[56]

Mansfield, Wilson, Sabbs, and others were also arrested and they remembered similar conditions. The deplorable conditions to which a number of black youth were subjected energized more youth to get involved in the movement, especially when a photograph, taken by Danny Lyon of SNCC, illustrating the conditions of the jail was published in the *Student Voice* gained state and regional headlines. Those students who had not been arrested or jailed for a long period of time knew that only by chance were they not the ones subjected to the dehumanizing forms of treatment. So as the summer ended and the fall began, the school year was disrupted because a number of black youth refused to attend school until their classmates were released from their dehumanizing jail cell.

To many black youth in Americus, their decision to stay out of school was personal. Several black youth, like Sabbs, followed siblings into the movement. So seeing a sibling treated inhumanly was extremely difficult. Sabbs remembered how she and others responded to their classmates and siblings being locked up. She stated, "We had protested all summer long and of course the majority of the people who were locked up during that time were students. My own brother had been in jail maybe two months under deplorable circumstances so when school started to open we campaigned to parents, we did everything saying if all of our [classmates] can't go back to school then nobody was

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[56] Owens, "Stolen Girls," 165–166. The author elaborated further on how the girls were mistreated and the conditions they were subjected to when she stated that "[They] were told by [law enforcement at the jail] they would be taken out one by one and killed." Furthermore, she stated, "Several girls began throwing up or suffering from diarrhea. The only toilet was a broken commode in the corner that couldn't be flushed. It was soon clogged to the top. With no other options to relieve themselves, the girls took to squatting over the shower drain, which quickly developed a suffocating stench. . . . When their menstrual cycles came, they tore strips off their dresses and fashioned them into napkins. Bathing wasn't an option."

going to go back to school."[57] Up until the period, the Americus Movement had focused on voter registration and integrating public facilities. Now it included a school boycott. In the fall of 1963, nearly a month before the school year began, students petitioned parents to keep their children out of school.

The strategy employed by black youth, along with SNCC, appeared to be ineffective initially because, according to the *Atlanta Daily World*, only thirty-two students did not report to Staley on the first day of class.[58] However, a tweak in the strategy increased the number of black youth participating. Instead of talking directly to the parents, black youth, who had been jailed and released, became key recruiters. Youth released from jail were used to quell the possibility of the school boycott increasing; however, they actually became the primary reason the boycott increased. Because they were students of Staley, they had access to all of the students. Sabbs remembered recruiting other students in the school. She stated, "[The goal was] to close the school down. And on the first day of school, we were protesting outside in our little perimeter to ask students to turn around and not go in and of course you still had some that went in but what I personally did along with [other] protestors [was] that we went into the school. I [was in the] 7th grade class [and I went] into [the school] under the premise that I was going to class and what we did though is go from classroom to classroom asking our friends to please leave . . . What we did was we pretty much emptied the school."[59]

While Sabbs and the other protestors were able to get a number of their classmates to leave Staley, they eventually suffered the same fate as those they were protesting to support. Based on reports from the *Times-Recorder*, "a total of some 45-50

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[57] Sabbs, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012."
[58] "32 Children Stay Out Of School; Apparent Protest," *Atlanta Daily World*, August 31, 1963.
[59] Sabbs, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012."

Negro students were arrested outside Staley today when they refused to stop singing freedom songs and shouting at pupils inside the school to leave classes and join in a boycott . . . the arrests came two different occasions, the first during mid-morning and the second about noon."[60] The response by law enforcement and the school board was not atypical in Americus considering what the race relations were at the time. So the "organized brutality in Americus", according to Tuck, was a typical method used and, unfortunately for black youth, they could not escape this method. Instead of adhering to a simple demand made by black youth, they decided to oppose it and subject more youth to the inhumane treatment a number of youth were already subjected to.[61]

The protest at Staley did not fundamentally improve race relations in Americus but the students were released from jail. The school board was satisfied because black youth were back in school instead of outside of the school protesting. Also, no immediate political, social, or educational concessions were made to end the protest. However, with the arrests and treatment of such a young populace along with the boycott, Americus was no longer a sub-movement of the Albany Movement. It was its own movement and with that came more local and national attention. While a number of black youth had to go through a very dehumanizing ordeal with very little to show for what they had gone through, their desire and willingness to be treated as human beings did not diminish. For example, when Carol Barner, one of the lost girls, was asked by the judge "if she promised to stay away from the protest and other 'mess' . . . she retorted angrily, 'mess,

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[60] The Times-Recorder, "Arrests Made This Morning," *The Times-Recorder*, n.d.; Walker, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 16, 2012." The increase in arrest of black youth persuaded some teachers, although very few, at Staley to participate in the boycott. One of the teachers was Mrs. Barnum and the other was Ms. Walker, who was an alumna of Staley. When asked why did decided to participate in the boycott and risk her job, she recalled the treatment of the students.
[61] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 176.

what mess!' [Black youth] were willing to do what we had to do to gain our freedom."[62] In addition to a number of them preserving and maintaining a willingness to sacrifice, more youth became aware of their circumstances because of what transpired in the summer and fall of 1963. Their involvement in the Americus Movement was a constant reminder of how essential equal treatment was to any demand for equality.

### An Unstoppable Force Meets an Unmovable Object

Although race relations in small towns across the South were complex during this period, certain norms permeated throughout the region, including Americus, that were non-negotiable. Mahone remembered it this way, "growing up in Americus as a young kid in a segregated society you are taught the lines are clearly drawn. It's a way of life and from day one there are certain lines you don't cross."[63] Throughout the twentieth century, those norms were thought to be so unmovable, particularly by whites, that political disenfranchisement, educational disparities between black and white youth, and economic exploitation were viewed as a way of life instead of systematic injustices. In fact by the 1960s, Jim Crow and the results of Jim Crow were so entrenched it created, as Sokol argued, "an abyss [between] white racial attitudes [and] reality."[64] Where blacks in Americus saw inequities caused by segregation, whites saw a system they cherished. For decades Jim Crow was able to flourish in Americus because whites were beholden to the town's norms and blacks feared white retribution. However, the events that transpired in 1962 and 1963 substituted fear with boldness in the black community and comfort with

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[62] Owens, "Stolen Girls," 218.
[63] Mahone, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012."
[64] Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 56.The different ways in which blacks and whites in the South, specifically in Americus, viewed reality often informed their view of the movement. Sokol argued that "whites were shocked when African Americans rose up in defiance in the 1960s. Black rebellion clashed so sharply with white perceptions that many disbelieved their own eyes.[64]

uneasiness in the white community. The drastic change in attitudes created great opportunities for those who were determined to be treated as humans and great challenges for those who wanted Americus to remain the same.

In an article entitled, "How it All Started in Americus, GA," Thelma Hunt Shirley noted that "Americus, a jungle town built on red clay with a population of 13,452, hidden in the backwoods of Georgia . . . finally erupted on the national scene [because] Negroes had gained a richness that was the envy, the fear, and engendered the hatred of their neighbors. They became bold enough to believe they had everything to gain, if they spoke up for their rights."[65] A shift in blacks' attitudes can be largely contributed to SNCC. The author also illustrated how the boldness from blacks in Americus steadily increased because of SNCC's organizational presence and the steady participation of black youth. Mahone confirms Shirley's report by stating, "I consider SNCC the vanguard of the movement in Americus even though you had other organizations like SCLC but they were much older. The SCLC was more reserved in terms of their approach to direct action. SNCC was confrontational and in the trenches everyday . . . and being young, being in the forefront and wanting to rebel, you gravitate towards that sector."[66] Even though SNCC depended heavily on the youth of Americus, by the mid-1960s, adult participation had dramatically improved, which allowed SNCC to protest racial injustices on multiple fronts.

As the Americus Movement gained momentum, members of SNCC continued to listen to the desires of the people to organize the next plan of attack. Leaders of the movement were well aware that movements could diminish if there was not an answer to

[65] Shirley, "How It All Started In Americus, Ga.," 6.
[66] Mahone, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012."

the question what is next. Sabbs, whose family was very involved in the movement, stated, "People thought that [the activities were] kind of unplanned but it really wasn't. I mean it was like the next step, you attack public transportation [then] you attack public accommodations. There were battle plans." [67] People had finally bought into the idea that people with shared goals, focus, and a willingness to sacrifice could become an unstoppable force. SNCC was able to mobilize strong leadership and the buy in to this idea fueled the movement while simultaneously clashing with the unmovable force, which was white opposition. Shortly after the insurrection charges were dropped and the students who were released from prison for protesting, SNCC organized a number of protests that hit directly at the practices of segregation. Sabbs stated,

> The public buses were closed down because we were trying to integrate the public buses. We [boycotted] lunch counters. We did just like [they] did in Greensboro, [North Carolina] integrating the public lunch counters and what not. They closed them and I'll never forget there was a pharmacy called Red's Pharmacy that I had been going to with my mother for years and years and years and they had a lunch counter and I had never ever sat at their lunch counter; never had a soda pop or a hamburger or whatever. And when we tried to integrate that lunch counter they took it out, they went out of business after that . . . of course, the school integration was a natural progression.[68]

Although integration became the tactic used to challenge the customs in Americus, it would not be accurate to say that the primary goal of the Americus Movement was to integrate. Leaders of the movement used integration because they knew those in power could not ignore all of the federal statues—*Brown* and Voting Rights Act—passed during this period. In addition to outside pressure, the local black community could not envision a world in which segregation remained and they could just be. A common belief held by those who participated in the movement was that one's humanity could be recognized

[67] Sabbs, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012."
[68] Ibid.

while at the same time restricting their educational, political, and economical mobility. Therefore, fighting against mistreatment included fighting against segregation because the customs of Jim Crow had a dehumanizing component to it.

Mahone stated "It was clear in people's minds that they were not getting as good of an education so once black students started attending white schools it opened up another world of possibilities."[69] Integrating white schools was just one key component of challenging the unmovable customs of Americus. Similar to the Little Rock Nine and so many other black youth who spearheaded the integration as a means to achieve equality, black youth in Americus took up the same fight. In the fall of 1964, "Robertina Freeman became one of three Negro girls to integrate Americus High School." Her sister, Juanita Wilson, remembered why this approach was useful during this period. She stated, "See everything with the Civil Rights Movement was to cut the white man's money so he would hurt and give in. The only way they could receive funding for school was [through adopting freedom of choice.]"

Although the initial integration of Americus High was able to fuel others, it caused major backlash as well. A letter sent, by a SNCC representative, detailing the status of integration in Americus stated "Last year, three girls integrated Americus High. This year, during the period for school transfer, some eighty-five students applied to transfer next year."[70] By the time the following school year came around, a majority of the students who had signed up to transfer decided to remain at the all black Sumter High or Staley. Regardless of the number, however, SNCC's tactic of attacking segregation in public schools made officials very uncomfortable.

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[69] Mahone, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, July 27, 2012."
[70] Harris, "SNCC Papers."

The initial response the school board had to the original three girls and those signed up to transfer in 1965 was subtle. According to the SNCC papers, their response to keep blacks from attending Americus high was "to relieve overcrowding the city is converting one of the junior highs into a high school. Also . . . teachers are exerting pressure on the kids not to transfer, tell them they'll get scholarships if they stay and so on."[71] Now the letter does not say if school officials forced teachers to persuade students but it is clear that integration of any kind was unacceptable to the powers that be. After the initial response proved futile, white officials did away with the subtlety and tried to stoke fear in those who chose to transfer. Using Robertina Freedman and Alex Brown as examples, they trumped up charges on the two with the hopes of ending the push for integration. An immediate news release by SNCC stated that "Robertina Freeman, 15 and Alex Brown, 15 have been sentenced to incarceration in the Georgia Training School until they are no longer minors. This is the maximum penalty and would mean that Robertina would spend three years and Alex Brown 6 years imprisoned on a charge of fornication."[72]

A letter in the SNCC files details the event this way; "In an attempt to intimidate students who might want to transfer, the cops pickup Freeman and Brown and charged them with fornication. They said they were innocent and a lie detector test confirmed this. Nevertheless the judge, James V. Smith, sentenced them to reform school until they reached 18 and 21 respectively. In other cases, he'd just released other kids, but in this case he used the maximum penalty."[73] Although these charges greatly affected the educational experiences of Ms. Freeman and Mr. Brown and infuriated the black

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Fuller, "SNCC Paper."

community, it was the subsequent events that forever changed Americus and the Americus Movement.

While the method used to prevent black students from attending Americus High angered blacks, the Mary Kate Bell incident elevated the frustration felt by blacks in Americus. According to Mahone, Bell, a Spelman graduate, was the first black women to run for public office in Americus. In a special election for the justice of the peace office, Bell lost under a cloud of suspicion. Upsetting, however, to the black community and some whites who had sided with the struggle for racial equality, was that Bell and three other women—Lena Turner, Mamie Campbell, and Gloria Wise—were arrested for refusing to stand in the segregated line. Tuck stated that after the women were arrested and refused to post bond "twenty-five people marched in protest . . . By the weekend, the marches had swelled to almost eight hundred people."[74] Participants of the movement did not make any new demands; in fact, their demands for political representation remained constant since the first voter registration drive in 1962. *The New York Times* reported that the demands from the participants were, "voiding and rescheduling of the election for justice of the peace because the election was illegal, grant longer registration hours, and name Negroes to election posts."[75] Similar to how a number of youth used integration as a tactic to challenge Jim Crow, adults like Bell tried to use political participation. Although she was not able to win the special election, her actions, along with those of the other three women arrested, brought attention to the entrenched political

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[74] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 181.
[75] Gene Roberts, "U.S. Judge Frees Four in Americus: Jailed Negro Women Out -- Demonstrations Resume," *New York Times*, July 31, 1965, sec. business financial, http://search.proquest.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/news/docview/116925238/abstract/13BA73E49E53AF529F7/1?accountid=10747.

disenfranchisement blacks faced. Besides being able to attend the school of their choosing, blacks needed to be able to participate in the political process.

Little evidence exists suggesting that the tenets of black power infiltrated the Americus Movement.[76] However, after the fornication charges brought against Freeman and Brown coupled with the arrest of Bell, racial tensions increased and so, too, did violent acts. The most violent act in Americus during this period occurred on July 29, 1965 when Andrew Aultman Whatley, a white man from Americus, was killed. Two black males, Eddie Lee Lamar and Charles Lee Hopkins, were accused of his murder which sharply divided the city. During the same time Whatley was being shot, a demonstration to free Bell was taking place. Leaders of the movement realized how the story would unfold. Two black men accused of killing a white man was never good especially when racial tensions were so high. What made the situation worse was the lack of concern each community had for the tensions escalating. In fact, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that shortly after the shooting "local residents were unnerved which caused a run on guns and ammunition." Tuck noted that the *"Wall Street Journal* recorded that in the aftermath of the murder, pistols were selling like 'hot cakes.'"[77] In the presence of paranoia and heightened racial tension, black youth provided some sense of hope that the racial tension would subside and the quest for one's humanity could be resumed. The *Chicago Tribune* stated,

> Several hours after the klan rally, more than 300 integrationists, most of them Negro teenagers, marched to the courthouse, held a rally and then marched away—thru a block of a white residential area. As they marched thru the

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[76] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 184. Tuck argued that "in some ways the Americus Movement provided a case study in the argument raging within SNCC by 1965 over the efficacy of nonviolence. Although nonviolence had failed to force significant progress, racial violence . . . provoked a reaction unprecedented even in southwest Georgia.

[77] Nelson, "Well-Armed Americus Gripped by Racial Fear," F14; Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 184.

> residential area, they sang 'we love the imperial wizard.' Their signs said 'We love the Ku Klux Klan—in our heart [but] 'we're not pleading for freedom, we're gonna take it.[78]

In 1965 the movement was waning and leaders of SNCC were leaving. Bwlack youth continued to try to be the unstoppable force to move an unmovable object. Tuck argued that the killing of Andrew Whatley had a catastrophic impact on the movement because it appeared as if SNCC lost control. He stated, "local SNCC leaders lost control of the demonstrations and despaired of the racial violence . . . The demonstrations dissipated in the face of retaliatory violence and the uncompromising stance of the city government. Locally, the momentum for mass demonstration was lost for good," which Tuck concluded essentially ended the Americus movement. [79] However, the assumption should not be that the end of the Americus Movement was the end of the students' struggle. Quite the contrary, black youth remained a formidable opponent to those who wanted to ignore their humanity.

### I Knew Segregation but not Racism

Black youth who grew up in Americus were well aware of the customs that had survived for decades. However, it was not until they embraced and participated in non-violent direct action that they experienced racism directly. The racism youth experienced while participating in demonstrations usually was collective but, once the movement ended and they attempted to challenge a racist institution by integrating, it became more individualized. Sabbs was an early participant in the Americus Movement and was one of the Stolen Girls but it was her integration experience that she remembered being the most difficult. She stated, "That was my season in hell and it was not a one shot deal or a few

[78] "Klansmen March in Georgia: Negroes Counter with One of Their Own," *Chicago Tribune (1963-Current file)*, August 9, 1965, sec. 1.
[79] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 185.

weeks. It was 9 months, every year, for four years. It was like a jail sentence. . . When I walked into Americus High School I turned 13 the year I went there. I went there at 12 yrs old and I didn't know the world. I never, I had never experienced that kind of racism."[80] She goes on to note that "I was one of the few that came and stayed. But a lot of them couldn't take it . . . it was hard getting up every morning and going into the lion's den because you never knew what was going to happen. It was always danger, it was always mental and physical threats. There was always maltreatment by the teachers."

This is an individual who spent weeks confined to the horrid conditions of the Leesburg Stockade and it was her fight to integrate Americus that taught her the most about racism. Sabbs experience is not unique because Ms. Mansfield, who also participated as a youth in the movement and was one of the Stolen Girls, had a similar experience. She was one of the first to integrate but did not graduate from Americus because the abuse took a toll on her. Mansfield noted, "I didn't graduate because I went through so much . . . it took a toll on me because I went through so much I had to take a break because I burned out. Being called names at school and stuff and being spat on just did something to me."[81] The perseverance illustrated by individuals who faced racist acts daily in order to challenge a system that refused to let them be is a marvel because they made a conscious effort to stand up against racism in order for those who were younger than them not to have similar experiences.

[80] Sabbs, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012."
[81] Mansfield, "Interview with Author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 17, 2012." Ms. Mansfield did note that she did eventually graduate and further her education in child development and nursing.

# Chapter 5

## Moving Beyond the Boundaries of Business as Usual: Black Youth Fight for Educational Improvements in Moultrie, Georgia

On June 30, 2012, alumni came from all over the state of Georgia, some from out of town, to participate in the 8th biennial Ram Round-Up. Ram Round-Up is a reunion that takes place in Moultrie, Georgia. This reunion is comprised of graduates who attended black schools from 1920-1970. Members of this event spent little time, if any, discussing the dilapidated conditions they had to endure during their school years. Very few conversations aroused about the political and economic disenfranchisement that many of their parents were subjected to which undoubtedly influenced their educational experience. They also do not talk about the second-class citizenship they endured after the *Brown* decision. Quite the contrary, Ram Round-Up is a celebration. Graduates note that this is an event where the memories are fond and therapeutic. They spent the weekend discussing the teachers who had a profound impact on their lives, the characteristics of their principals, the pranks they pulled, and, of course, the football state championship of 1961.[1]

Inevitably, the conversations within some circles illuminated the social components of education. Graduates of these segregated schools remembered lovers lost and lovers gained (some of whom are still married). As they ate, drank, danced, and laughed, they focused on how their institution shaped who they were and who they became. Ironically, this event lasted through America's Independence Day; graduates of the segregated black schools did not elevate the ways in which they fought for freedom.

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[1] Reverend Johnny McBurrows, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, February 17, 2012, February 17, 2012; Dale Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012, March 18, 2012.

Instead, they used this event to remember the good times and fellowship with those who helped create those memorable moments.

Despite the good memories that were elevated at the reunion, the former students of black schools in Moultrie, Georgia, located in Colquitt County, have not forgotten about the inequities and challenges they faced during the same period they now celebrate. While they talked about the teacher that coddled them, the social, economic, and political context of the period in which the coddling took place is not a distant memory.[2] As they sang their alma mater, the conditions of their schools most likely surfaced in their minds and as a representative from President Barack Obama's campaign—Dr. Delores Ensley Hawkins—spoke, some had to think that a little over forty years ago they were advocating as youth for full citizenship. While the purpose of the reunion is not to elevate the issues they faced and how they responded, alums have preserved this part of the story as well.[3]

Graduates of Colquitt County Training School, Moultrie High for Negro Youth, Charlie A. Gray, and William Bryant High have found the triumphs and tragedies of their educational experiences worth preserving. These experiences signifies a complexity that lies somewhere between advancement and stagnation. Dating as far back as the early twentieth century, black students dealt with this paradox. Black youth entered a school system where the boundaries of citizenship and equality were fixed alongside racial lines which meant that whites received the best resources available whereas blacks were given the leftovers.

[2] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Vivian Gunn Morris, *The Price They Paid: Desegregation in an African American Community* (Teachers College Press, 2002).
[3] Nina Banister, "Pride in Color," *The Moultrie Observer*, February 12, 1993; Reverend Jerry Denegall, "A History of the First Avenue Box: Rat Row and Its Neighborhood," n.d.

Black's educational achievements were directly related to a time when black youth challenged the racial customs in Colquitt County, particularly in Moultrie, and demanded educational improvements to their schools. Once students began to advocate for better facilities, they realized, as their peers in Tifton and Americus, that a new norm could be established. As they fought to improve their educational facilities, they reconceptualized what full citizenship and educational equality meant, which permanently shifted the racial boundaries in Moultrie, Georgia.

Black youth decided to attack the racial boundaries of Moultrie in the mid-1960s. Several factors contributed to their success in some areas. First, *Brown* was the law of the land. Second, SNCC had established a presence in the area. Finally, the Albany Movement had gained national notoriety which made nearby towns cognizant of how they responded to racial matters. While blacks who grew up in Moultrie and Colquitt prior to the 1950s had a very different response than those in the 1960s, each generation found a number of ills unsettling, which ranged from, but were not limited to, a lack of economic opportunities and hazardous school conditions. Too often they found themselves at the bottom of the economic order with little opportunity for advancement and lacking essential educational resources. Timothy Minchin and John Salmond stated, "decades of segregation had locked African Americans into the worst jobs, while whites gained significant economic benefit from this system." Furthermore, the authors suggested that whites often coerced blacks in settling for the status quo by threatening them "[with the loss of] their jobs and homes."[4] Consistently, the economic booms that Moultrie experienced throughout its history typically skipped over black Moultrians.

[4] Timothy J. Minchin and John A. Salmond, *After the Dream: Black and White Southerners Since 1965*, Civil Rights and the Struggle for Black Equality in the Twentieth Century (Lexington, Ky: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 36, 47.

Similar to black parents in Tifton and Americus, most black adults were bound by their limited educational opportunities to thwart the customs of Moultrie. The lack of economic mobility along with the racial customs in Moultrie which developed over time greatly influenced the educational opportunities black youth had access to before and after the *Brown* decision. Therefore, the civil unrest that occurred in the 1960s began brewing in late 19th century.

## Background

Moultrie was founded in 1859 and named after General William Moultrie, who was a revolutionary war hero. Known primarily for its production in agriculture, the city experienced an economic boom as timber supply filled its naval stores. According to W.A. Covington, during the same period a school was established along with a newspaper, a railroad, and several businesses.[5] Moultrie experienced another economic boom in the early 20th century with the start of World War I. William F. Holmes stated that "the outbreak of World War I in 1914 created new demands for foodstuffs, and within a short time modern meat packing plants opened in Moultrie."[6] When the meat packing plant was established in Moultrie, according to Covington, "it revolutionized agriculture and industry," Moultrie needed.[7] Colquitt County benefited greatly from a diversity of commerce during this period and remained largely dependent on agriculture. Moultrie, more specifically, was a farmland community that heavily depended on agriculture which affected black Moultrians because entering the 20th century their worth

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[5] W. A. Covington, *History of Colquitt County [Georgia]* (Apple Manor Press, 2011).
[6] William F. Holmes, "Economic Developments, 1890-1940," in *A History of Georgia*, 2nd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 270.
[7] Covington, *History of Colquitt County [Georgia]*, 223.

was only visible through their labor. Therefore, sharecropping and domestic servitude were the primary economic industries that hired them.[8]

The economic success that occurred in Moultrie in the later part of the 19th century and the early part of the 20th century did not include the black community. Blacks remained economically dependent on whites. As John Smith stated, “black tenant farmers and sharecroppers remained in ‘slavery of debt’ to white landowners and cotton factors.”[9] These kinds of economic structures made it very difficult for blacks to establish an educational structure or send their children to school with any regularity. Although the history of Moultrie tends to focus on the founding of the town and how it developed economically, the race relations that were established during its founding and how those relations developed over time is equally important.

Similar to Americus, the history of black Moultrians is largely ignored, at least during the early periods. However, a number of inferences can be made about race relations by examining the level of equality based on the type of education citizens could access. Covington noted that a rudimentary elementary school was established in Moultrie in the late 1860s but did not say whether black children had access to formal education during the period. However, local historians of Moultrie’s black education, Ms. Ruth Mason and Ms. Annie Ruth Thompson believed that “education was a problem for Negroes in Colquitt County. In Moultrie, there were no exceptions. Around 1907-1908

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[8] “SNCC Papers,” 1965 1963, SCC Papers, King Center. Box 96, Folder 11. A letter in the SNCC files noted that the distinction between the black neighborhood in Moultrie and the white neighborhood was clear. It stated, “like all southern towns, you can tell when you pass into the Negro section. It’s often as tangible as crossing the railroad tracks. The paved roads stop, and red mud or red dust, depending on the weather, takes over. The houses are poorer, unpainted, because the people live in them aren’t allowed to hold decent jobs.

[9] John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 210.

Negro children attended school in the C.M.E. Methodist Church."[10] Like blacks in Americus, blacks did see improvements in their educational opportunities during the early years of the 20th century, but it was definitely not equal to whites.[11]

Educational opportunities changed in the 1920s. In 1920, Moultrie High School for Negro Youth was built and a decade later more improvements were made for black youth by the addition of 10th and 11th grades. One would think that by the mid-20th century that racial relations, by means of educational improvements, were better in Moultrie but quite the opposite occurred. The educational disparities that Covington noted in the 1930s, were "7,074 whites" enrolled in school compared to only "1,870 colored," still persisted primarily because whites in neighboring towns like Doerun made it difficult for black parents to send their children to Moultrie where the only black high school in the county was located. Furthermore, Colquitt County remained "opposed to integration at any time, in between times, and at all times, in all forms."[12] Therefore, the racial customs that had been established since its founding impacted the educational experiences of black youth during the 1950s, 60s, and early 70s. The second-class status that a number of blacks endured for nearly a century came to a boil in the mid-1960s which challenged the very foundation of the status quo.

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[10] Mason, Ruth and Annie Ruth Thompson, "History of Public Education for Negro Children in Moultrie, Georgia" (The Ram Round-Up, n.d.).
[11] Denegall, "A History of the First Avenue Box: Rat Row and Its Neighborhood." Ms. Mildred Daniels is given credit for examining the early years of Colquitt County school board documents and according to her "during the early years of black children school years, there were two buildings. One in Moultrie and the other in Norman park." She also suggested that classes were housed in churches with no transportation or lunchrooms."
[12] Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 145.

## The Other Side of Bliss

Black youth who grew up in Moultrie had similar experiences as those who grew up in Tifton and Americus. However, those who grew up in the rural areas of Colquitt County like Doerun, a smaller town in Colquitt County outside of Moultrie, faced opposition that black students in Moultrie, Tifton and Americus did not. This change meant their experiences were very different. The economic plight of blacks living in the rural parts of the county had very real consequences for black youth because their labor was factored into profit margins. Robert Ziegler discussed the interconnection between race and labor and the profound implications it had on black families dating as far back as the Civil War. Furthermore, Adam Faircloth noted how many white southerners ignored policies promoted by the Fair Employment Practices Committee because they believed that "blacks were only fit for certain jobs, and white workers would never stand the presence of blacks in the same grades."[13] While scholars who focus on labor and race during the Civil Rights period have illustrated how a number of white southerners were only comfortable with hiring blacks as domestic workers or field hands, they have largely ignored how this ideology negatively affected the educational experiences of black youth. Black parents had to constantly weigh between sending their children to school, which meant that they would suffer economically, or send their children to the field, which meant that they would always be in the field. In addition to constantly battling this conundrum, black parents had to deal with white farmers who did not believe black children needed an education to fulfill their positions in life.

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[13] Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Adam Fairclough, *Better Day Coming: Blacks and Equality, 1890-2000* (New York: Viking, 2001), 186.

Black communities in rural areas had a dual fight because black education was already being neglected plus black youth worth was tied into their labor. Growing up in Doerun, Ann Wheeler and her younger brother Johnny McBurrows remembered how education was stressed in their community yet so few of their peers had access to a formal education. Because a number of black families remained tied to sharecropping in the rural parts of Colquitt County, education was very unstable. McBurrows stated, "As a kid I remember living on a farm where most of the parents were farmers and most of the kids didn't get a chance to go to school very often because being on a farm many kids ended up in the fields [during] the most important time of learning. School always opened in September but most of the farm kids were picking cotton into October. So we went to school after school had started and then prior to school finishing each term, we were in the field selling our tobacco, doing hard farm work."[14] He noted that this was the case mostly for males but black females' access to education was somewhat as problematic because he noted that, although they had access to formal education, they were not expected to use their education for economic mobility but to return to their stations in life as a domestic worker. Wheeler recalled that in Doerun, "once young black men, whose fathers did not own their own farm, got big enough [which was typically around the 7th grade] that was it for their education. It was unusual for black young males out of the rural area to go high school."[15] While the educational level of a number of black youth in southwest Georgia increased during this period, too many of them were barred from the chance of improving their circumstances.

[14] McBurrows, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, February 17, 2012.
[15] Ann Wheeler, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012, March 15, 2012.

Nonetheless, black parents in a very difficult position when it came to making educational decisions for their children, did play an essential part in their children obtaining formal education. Wheeler and McBurrows stated that it was because of their father, Sam McBurrows, that they were able to receive a formal education. Even though their father only had a 3rd grade education, he was determined to see all his children graduate high school because he believed that education was the only tool that would relinquish black people from the bonds of sharecropping and domestic work.[16] McBurrows said, "My father had what we called mother wit and he was determined to see all his children obtained an education."[17] When parents made the decision to send their children to school, concessions had to be made by both parties. For example, Sam McBurrows picked up another job at the local fertilizing plant, and the children would sometime only go to school for half a day. Although the white landowners that McBurrows sharecropped for agreed to this arrangement, a number of white farmers were against it. McBurrows and Wheeler vividly remembered their bus being stopped by a white farmer to return one of their classmates back to the farm. Like in many places throughout the South, education was seen as the great equalizer in rural Colquitt County but there were so many factors that contributed to the educational experiences of black youth.

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[16] McBurrows, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, February 17, 2012. Reverend McBurrows noted that his father was not the only black parent in rural Colquitt County that made sure his children had access to a formal education. He stated, "There were some strong black parents who were determined and they fought against all odds. However, most parents could not fight for their children to go to school because they started a crop, and if they raised any opposition the landlord ran them away. So they had no compensation for all the work they put in. I saw a number of black farmers who were chased out of town because they tried to change the educational conditions of their children.

[17] Ibid. Reverend McBurrows also stated "95% of the young kids I grew up with never finished high school and only 1% worked on a job that paid benefits and retirement."

Besides being viewed as a commodity for farming, the ways black youth were treated and the formal education they had access to was second-class. Even though black parents sacrificed a great deal, the educational experiences of black youth in the 1950s and 60s was in direct contrast to the *Brown* decision. Regardless of the sacrifices made by parents or the legislation passed by the federal government, which was ignored anyway, blacks in Colquitt County were not viewed as equals. Wheeler said throughout her educational career, she only remembered starting school on the first day once. In addition to constantly starting school late, she remembered the arduous and often dangerous miles she and her siblings had to walk to reach school. The toll the walk took was remembered by Wheeler and McBurrows. He said that when he was in the 3rd grade that he was so tired on the walk back from school that he tried to "ride this huge turtle because [he] was so beat."[18]

In addition to the physical toll of the walks, the walk was dangerous as well. Black youth, who grew up in rural areas, often had to walk through the white side of town where they often encountered different levels of harassment. Wheeler recalled "White youth would sick the dogs on you because you were black and you were coming from school and you supposed to be working," she continued "it was like sport to them . . . back then we really were not considered humans . . . it was normal to be harassed and threatened and picked at."[19] Black youth having to deal with the normalcy of being harassed was difficult enough, but the type of education they had access to shortly after *Brown* reinforced the ideas of their second-class status.

[18] Ibid.
[19] Wheeler, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012.

White farmers, who controlled the school board, believed that educating black youth was a waste of time so, in areas like Doerun, the bare minimum was done. For example, Wheeler, who is a little older that McBurrows, spent all of her elementary years at a church school called Hasting before attending Moultrie High for Negro Youth (which later became William Bryant High School). However, by the time her younger siblings began elementary school, particularly McBurrows, the school board purchased former military barracks from Spencefield and created Doerun elementary for black youth. Although McBurrows remembered the space being accommodating, he also noted that "it had no gas and no heat." In fact, the school board would only bring coals once a month so the students "cut wood" to heat the barracks.[20]

During this same period, a white high school was built in Doerun and another was built in Moultrie. The school board provided only one black high school for black youth in the entire county to attend. A common custom practiced in Moultrie, as it was in Tifton and Americus, was that black schools and black students remained the depository of white materials after *Brown*. McBurrows and Wheeler recalled their books and buses were from the white schools. He stated, "we had secondhand books, we road on the secondhand school bus. Even when they bused us to school our buses were the buses that had been used two or three years by the white school."[21] As rural blacks, who were able to survive the economic entrapments of Colquitt County, travelled to Moultrie for high school, they found out that black students who lived in the city were susceptible to very similar educational conditions as those who lived in the country.

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[20] McBurrows, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, February 17, 2012.
[21] Ibid.

Black youth who grew up in Moultrie did not have to deal with the same type of opposition their counterparts from the rural area faced because Moultrie was a small metropolis in southwest Georgia. By the mid-twentieth century it did not depend on the labor of black youth as did the surrounding rural communities. Therefore, students did not have to worry about starting the school year a month later or being removed by white farmers to go work the field. Furthermore, their educational experiences were not full of dangerous encounters with white students who considered it a sport to terrorize black youth. However, by the time those who grew up in the city met up with those who grew up in the country in high school, neither group's experiences aligned with the rhetoric of *Brown* and that did not change as they entered into William Bryant High. Undoubtedly, some concessions were made because of the legal case which is evident by the increase in black schools that were built—Charlie A. Gray—or refurbished—Doerun Elementary—shortly after the decision, but black youth remained without access to the first-class education their white counterparts received.

Until 1957, William Bryant High was responsible for educating all black youth in Moultrie 1st-12th grade. Given the fact that very little upkeep had been done to the school since the 1940s, by the late 1950s and early 60s the wear and tear of housing so many students had become obvious.[22] Jimmy Holton, alum of William Bryant and leader of the student movement, stated he believed Charlie A. Gray was built "because [William Bryant] did not have the space. The population of blacks was growing [the school board]

[22] Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012; J.W Green Jr, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012, March 15, 2012. It is important to note that Mr. Williams and Green stated that improvements were made to Williams Bryant High during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

had no choice because there was no room there to put students.[23] One of the common traits elevated by former students, besides the student-teacher relationship, (Moultrie High School for Negro Youth which was renamed William Bryant High) was how the structure of the school was waning because of overcrowding and the lack of upkeep. Alums who were only six or seven years old when they entered Moultrie High and stayed only a year remembered how the school lacked basic resources in addition to being overcrowded. While the building of Charlie A. Gray may have been viewed as progress by the powers that be, the reality is that it was really a temporary solution to a systematic problem that did not put a high priority on educating black students. The school board's refusal to make any significant investments in black education could not be wiped away with the building of an elementary school because those who made it to high school experienced the dilapidated conditions and limited resources.

Charlie A. Gray opened its doors at the beginning of the year in 1957. Although the newly built black school did very little to address the hazardous conditions experienced by those who remained at William Bryant, a number of black youth who were elementary age at the time remembered how vastly different their elementary experiences were from their high school experiences.[24] For example, J.W. Green Jr. began his educational career at William Bryant High; however, he spent his remaining elementary years at Charlie A. Gray.[25] He remembered the dramatic structural improvements. He also recalled the resources being somewhat better in elementary than

[23] Jimmy Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012, July 20, 2012.
[24] Denegall, "A History of the First Avenue Box: Rat Row and Its Neighborhood." Charlie A. Gray was a renowned educator who taught at Moultrie High for Negro Youth. The elementary school was named in honor of him.
[25] Green Jr, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012.

they were in high school but noted that still "[they] had it on a different scale" than their white counterparts.[26]

Dale Williams, like Green, was also one who had the opportunity to attend the newly built school. When asked what he remembered most about his experiences, he stated, "It was a new structure so everything was new and alike."[27] The same memory was recalled by Mr. Holton when asked about his transition from the overcrowded school to the newly built school. Those who were able to attend the new black elementary school recalled the mood as one of relief rather than progress. However, when Charlie A. Gray was built, the black youth in Moultrie understood that the actions taken were done out of necessity and the avoidance of national attention rather than fairness. They grew up in a place where the racial boundaries were explicit. Thus, Williams, Green, and Mr. Holton realized at an early age that a new building did not equate to progress or equality. This is precisely the reason Holton noted that the school was built out of obligation and Green suggested it was built on a "different scale." Black students experienced firsthand that when resources were funneled to them, the additions still uniquely undergirded their second-class citizenship. Consequently, as some black youth escaped the hazardous conditions of William Bryant High, temporarily, the racial customs of Moultrie penetrated through the newly built structure and affected their educational experiences in similar ways.

[26] Ibid.
[27] Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012.

The continuation of racialized practices established in Moultrie in the nineteenth century forced black youth to develop a keen sense about society.[28] Quickly they learned the town's racial ethos because it was a survival mechanism. When Wheeler, who was raised in Doerun but attended high school in Moultrie, noted that white children viewed harassing black children as a sport; it should not be viewed as children being children within their historical context. The harassment of black youth should be couched in a framework that examines how individuals, groups, and institutional forms of harassment were systematic and denied the citizenship of black youth.

The older black youth became, the more they understood this reality, especially as they matriculated through school. Holton noted that he and his classmates understood at a young age that they were aware of the materials they did not have but did not link the lack of resources to a larger struggle for citizenship and educational equality. [29] However, as they got older and became more aware of the racial message that created their educational conditions, black youth in Moultrie grew increasingly frustrated because a number of the opportunities afforded to the citizens of Moultrie and Colquitt County continued to escape them. The racial inequities in Moultrie were so engrained that even a watershed case like *Brown* did little to disrupt the norm. In fact, *Brown* received little attention in Colquitt County according to my interviewees.[30]

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[28] Wilma King, *African American Childhoods: Historical Perspectives from Slavery to Civil Rights*, First Edition (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (NYU Press, 2011).

[29] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.

[30] Wheeler, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012; McBurrows, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, February 17, 2012; Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012; Green Jr, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012; Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012; Herman Kitchen, "The School Boycott, Moultrie, Georgia," n.d., King Center, SNCC Papers; Banister, "Pride in Color"; Harris, "SNCC Papers," n.d., King Center.

In fairness, the Colquitt County school officials were not as negligent toward educating black students as some of the officials from neighboring counties in southwest Georgia. As illustrated by board minutes, the Colquitt County School Board discussed the building of Charlie A. Gray in 1953 as part of the School Building Authorities Act. This act gave school officials the authority to use their discretion in determining how building funds were allocated to "provide in the immediate future additional buildings, facilities and improvements." [31] With the authority given by the state, local officials decided to make a number of improvements to educational facilities and build new ones, which included a couple of black elementary schools throughout the county. However, the school that gave blacks the best chance for social and economical mobility continued to be ignored by the Colquitt County School Board. In fact, the only resolution that was put forth by school officials from 1950-1965, as it relates to black high school education, was the remolding of the oldest and most dire part of William Bryant High. Given the fact that school officials in Colquitt County refused to invest in black students beyond elementary school, one can conclude that they worked within the racial framework of making sure blacks remained within their allotted caste. So yes there were investments in black education but only the type of education that kept blacks from rural areas susceptible to field work and those who lived in small cities tied to menial labor. Even when school boards like Colquitt County provided what they considered aid to black schools, the aid was less than what blacks requested.

[31] Georgia Moultrie, "Minutes of Meetings of the Colquitt County School Board" (Colquitt County School Board, March 1, 1955). Minutes from a school board meeting in 1953 also noted that the same type of resolution occurred for black students who lived in Doerum. The minutes noted that "the resolution of acceptance of this board adopted in April 10, 1953 and described as a Doerun Colored Elementary School have been completed and submitted . . . the architects estimate will cost $127,777.00."

Throughout southwest Georgia and particularly in Moultrie, school boards and the black community often clashed because each group had very different ideas about black education. School officials worked from a minimalist framework whereas the concepts of equality and citizenship guided the demands of blacks, specifically black youth.[32] The conflict over education increased after the *Brown* decision as local officials became more concerned about their exposure to outside entities meddling into local affairs and as black youth became increasingly intolerant with how the school board defined educational progress.[33] Even with outside agitation being a possibility and black youth growing more intolerant, the Colquitt County School Board remained crafty as to how to provide educational opportunities for black students that were not on par with that of whites. School officials accomplished this feat by using a two prong approach.

First they wanted to make sure that concessions to requests did not disrupt the status quo. As a result, demands made to equalize the school system were often ignored. For example, the building of Charlie A. Gray was a concession by the school board. William Bryant High was already overcrowded and with the increase enrollment of rural students attending high school something had to be done. Although the building of a black elementary school was a concession, it fell within the racial restrictions of Colquitt County. The fact that black students who attended Charlie A. Gray received nothing more

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[32] Vincent Willis, "'Let Me in, I Have the Right to Be Here:' Black Youth Struggle for Equal Education and Full Citizenship After the Brown Decision, 1954-1969," *Citizenship Teaching & Learning* (Forthcoming 2013); Joy Ann Williamson-Lott, Linda Darling-Hammond, and Maria Hyler, "Education and the Quest for African American Citizenship: An Overview," in *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship, 1865-Present*, ed. Henry Louis Gates et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Chris Armstrong and Andrew Mason, "Introduction: Democratic Citizenship and Its Futures," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 14, no. 5 (2011): 553–560, doi:10.1080/13698230.2011.617118.

[33] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006); Michael J Klarman, *Unfinished Business: Racial Equality in American History* (Oxford University Press, 2007); Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance: Southern Opposition to the Second Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

than a new facility illuminates that they still functioned within the boundaries of educational inequality.

As was the case in Tifton and Americus, black youth also continued to receive second-hand materials that whites deemed no longer good enough for their children. Holton stated, "All [of] our materials, we had to share. We had to share books, share, share, share. Sometimes two would have one book or three had one book at one time. Then it was hand me downs, most of the hand me down books were passed down to us and there was a few new books here and there but not to accommodate a whole classroom. [Whites would] get new books and [every student in the] class would get new books."[34] Holton's recollection of his experience at Charlie A. Grey was similar to a younger classmate of his, Green. He remembered the second-hand materials this way, "we received hand-me down or what the [white] schools [labeled old] materials. Once they finished with them and was ready to purchase new ones, they would send the old ones to us."[35] Outside of conceding a new building structure, school officials refused to concede that black youth were entitled to the same materials as white youth regardless of a federal mandate.

The other approach that the Colquitt County School Board utilized to sustain the status quo was to ignore the plight of black students all together. As stated earlier, the school board ignored the conditions at William Bryant for over a decade. During this period, William Bryant reached overcapacity by fifty-percent and lacked basic resources like heat. Black youth also had to deal with their school being treated like a landfill for white schools to send old goods. The fact that school officials ignored the concerns of

[34] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[35] Green Jr., Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012.

blacks helped foster the climate in which too many black youth were confined to a second-class education. Although the approach taken by the board was not unique, these types of actions are often discussed as a byproduct of the Jim Crow South rather than being elevated for the real consequences they had on the educational experiences of black youth.

Given these conditions, it is not surprising that a number of black youth refused to accept second-class treatment as a way of life. They viewed the school board's minimalist approach to their education as an attack on their rights as citizens of Colquitt County. Ironically, these approaches by school officials ignited the social movement in Moultrie. Students who had grown weary of waiting on a school board to do the right thing by improving the conditions of their school used direct action to demand improvements. Through direct action, black youth made sure that the school board could no longer ignore their educational needs.

### Difficult to Gain Traction

Even for black youth in Moultrie, the decision to use direct action had to be weighed. The fear that permeated throughout the black community did not omit black students. Although Moultrie did not have the violent history of the Mississippi Delta or Birmingham, the fear that black Moultrians felt was a visible reality.[36] When Charles Payne noted that "fear was so obviously a hurdle to participating in the Movement that it can easily become an all-purpose explanation," he was not only referring to the

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[36] Horace Huntley, *Foot Soldiers for Democracy: The Men, Women, and Children of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement* (University of Illinois Press, 2009); Charles M Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1996); Stephen J. Whitfield, *A Death in the Delta: The Story of Emmett Till* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Henry Hampton, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn, *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s Through the 1980s* (Bantam, 1991).

movement in Mississippi.[37] Fear arrested a number of black people for a host of reasons throughout the South and Moultrie was no different. As in the other settings, one reason a number of adults were hesitant to join the movement in Colquitt County was largely economic. The jobs that blacks had access to barely provided enough means to feed and clothe their family so a number of them could not afford being dismissed from their job because of their involvement in the movement. When Holton was asked about the fear of the black community in Moultrie, he noted "[they were fearful] of losing their lives [and their] livelihood. You know jobs. Klansmen had a great influence in Colquitt County [which meant] you could lose your job. [So] people were scared of being harmed."[38] In addition to noting that black adults were fearful, Holton also stated that their fear was passed down to the youth. Holton said, "Even [people] my age were afraid. [In fact] most of the youth were afraid."[39]

Williams, a classmate of Holton, agreed with Holton's assessment that fear existed among the adults but he did not feel that youth were as fearful. In fact Williams believed that "children didn't realize how much danger they possibly could have been in," which implies that they were not as fearful as they should have been.[40] While the two may differ on the degree to which fear existed among the youth, both agreed that fear was one of the traits portrayed by the black community in Moultrie during the late 1950s and early 1960s. The degree to which fear influenced youth participation in the movement may be debatable but the fact that fear made it difficult for the movement to gain traction

[37] Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 283.
[38] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012.

is not. The fear that existed in Moultrie was noticed by the leaders of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as well.

SNCC arrived in Moultrie, Georgia in the summer of 1964. Enthused by some measured success and disappointment from the Southwest Georgia Project, particularly the Albany Movement, they came to Colquitt County with the intention of mobilizing the black community around a social, political, and educational issue of their choosing. Aware of the political disenfranchisement taking place throughout southwest Georgia, SNCC usually galvanized people around voter registration. Mukasa Dada stated that "voter registration was used to get working class people talking which brought up other issues that blacks were dealing within the community."[41] However, voter registration did not take off as they hoped it would because of fear. A letter by James Stanley Parry to SNCC's headquarters about Moultrie stated that "SNCC has been working in Moultrie since the summer, seemingly without success. Many people were afraid, with reason, of what might happen to their jobs or their homes, or what might happen to their lives, if they were to participate in the movement.

Blacks in Moultrie had not invited SNCC to Colquitt County, even though they were not upset at the presence. Yet, that did not mean they were ready to become foot soldiers for the "cause." African Americans were well aware of the injustices they faced daily but had not reached a consensus on how to address their concerns. Parry's letter summed it up this way, "Some had taken all they could of a society in which they were called 'boy' until their hair was white, where the only places for them were the back door and back of the broom, and had escaped through drunkenness and numbness. Others felt

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[41] Mukasa Dada, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 8, 2012, March 8, 2012.

it was futile for five or ten or a hundred people to try to challenge what's been building in the South for three hundred years."[42] Besides the fear that was so entrenched in Moultrie during the mid-1960s, pessimism also made it very difficult for a social movement to gain traction. Before an effective social movement could take place in Moultrie, SNCC had to find enough people who were not arrested by fear and believed they had the power to change the racial boundaries. This was a difficult task because they could not even get people to attend mass meetings. In such a climate, they surely would not agree to participate in a boycott. For almost a year, Herman Kitchen and Isaac Simpkins attempted to organize a social movement in Moultrie with little to no success. Soon the two eventually found a constituency and an issue that moved the movement in Moultrie from non-existent to transformational. However, the process to getting to a transformational movement was not an easy one.

### Out-front

Holton portrayed Moultrie after the *Brown* decision as a typical "small southern town" where Jim Crow laws ruled and any suggestion of change was met with opposition. He also noted that blacks had accepted this way of life which oftentimes made the small town appear to be stuck in time. Another similarity that Moultrie had in common with other places in southwest Georgia was that their social movement started with a handful of people. In an area where blacks were a considerable percentage of the population, when SNCC began recruiting, the majority of blacks were not available. Faced with the reality that people, black or white, would not join the movement in

[42] James Parry, "SNCC Papers," March 8, 1965, King Center.

droves, the early part of the movement depended largely on a small number of black youth.

Similar to the Tifton movement, black youth in Moultrie were out-front when the Civil Rights Movement started in Colquitt County. Unlike Barbara Johns, the Little Rock Nine, and other black youth who were great students and decided to become activists, the youth who were the first to heed SNCC's call to action were not the prototype. They would not have been selected to integrate the segregated white schools nor were they held in any high regard. Holton described the initial joiners of the movement this way, "We weren't that popular. We weren't the brightest. I think more or less, we were the wrong people doing the right thing"[43] He also suggested that some of the youth who joined the movement initially were not foreign to disciplinary infractions so the foundation of the Moultrie Movement hinged on students who were not voted by classmates as the most likely to succeed. Nevertheless, it was high school students like Jimmy Holton, known throughout Moultrie as being the youth leader, who were the initiators and sustainers of the Moultrie Movement.

The Moultrie black youth activists were optimistic. They grew up in a time when defeating Jim Crow was not an insurmountable task. Of course there was no definitive evidence that segregation could be defeated, they were aware that the traditions of Jim Crow had been severely crippled in other parts of southwest Georgia and the South generally. By the time SNCC arrived in Moultrie, black students were aware of the demands being made by their counterparts in the region. Williams noted that they were aware of the Albany movement and how that movement "played a major role in what was

[43] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.

going on [in Moultrie.]"[44] Therefore, it is not surprising that youth leadership and their participation proved very pivotal in Moultrie because of the contributions that were being made by youth to the larger Civil Rights Movement. In addition to believing that the impossible was possible due to the social context of the period, the individual and collective frustration deeply contributed to black youth being in the forefront in Moultrie. According to Holton, youth were driven by the social context of the period but they also were tired of the culture that arrested their inalienable rights. He stated, "We wanted to be a people, we wanted to be a race of people that just said no, no, enough of this. It's time to say no to this. I think people needed the pride, now we could stand up . . . we're not afraid anymore."[45] The dissatisfaction felt among the youth, along with an enormous amount of evidence of success from their neighboring colleagues, catapulted them to a leadership position and persuaded a number of them to join SNCC.

The events outside of Moultrie combined with the dissatisfaction felt by Moultrie's black youth not only swayed them to join but it also influenced them to adopt the methods used by SNCC during the period. The adoption of direct action as a form of protest proved pivotal to challenging the systematic inequities in Moultrie. In the same letter Parry wrote to SNCC's headquarters about the fear that existed within the black community, he also stated "the younger people, the students, looked at things differently; things were in a mess, and it was intolerable to them to live in a world that needed so much. So after a while, they got fed up and took matters out of their parents' hands."[46]

Holton reiterated this point by noting "there were 10 to 12 of us trying to do some things . . . we were fine. We had no fear. We would challenge them [by] walking into a

[44] Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012.
[45] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[46] Parry, "SNCC Papers."

restaurant; we did some things off and on because we didn't have that fear. Plus, we didn't have to worry about them firing us. We were independent."[47] The data reveal that it was the youth who initially took on the dangerous tasks of walking into segregated public facilities knowing they could be arrested or beaten. Although the initial acts were spontaneous and seemed minute, they were effective because they portrayed some form of activity in Moultrie. Furthermore, these small yet impulsive forms of protest laid the foundation for the Moultrie Movement because, without them, the school movement may not have emerged. As the need for a movement remained secret conversations for black adults in Moultrie, black youth brought it to the public sphere. Those black youth who started on the frontline and remained gave SNCC a presence in a place it desperately needed. With black youth leading the charge, white officials could not attribute the feeling of dissatisfaction to outside agitation.

**A Response Informed by Reality**

An incident that happened to Green illuminated the reality that black students faced growing up in Moultrie. He stated,

> [While at the movies] my Sunday school teacher wanted a fountain soda so they would serve fountain soda at the drug store upon the corner. I knew the rules, go to the back stand at the back door and wait until you are asked, can I serve you or what do you want? [As I was waiting] a term was used that I never heard before. . . White lady was standing in front of me with a child in her arms and by her leg so the child said mama what's that and she turned around and looked and she said a nigger. So I looked back to see what a nigger was but wasn't no one standing behind me. I was the only one there and so I took it as being offensive so I left out of the pharmacy without getting the fountain soda and ran down and told my mother that the women just called me a nigger and mama said that's alright baby.[48]

[47] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[48] Green Jr., Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012.

Even though he was unaware of the economic constraints his mother faced at the time, the lesson he learned was direct and painful. An ordinary day turned into a life lesson on citizenship and the lesson he was taught was one that was reinforced over and over again. Although a number of black youth may not have experienced the citizenship lesson Green was taught because Moultrie was a very segregated place, their educational reality at William Bryant High was an excellent teacher. Williams remembered how he first came to understand his reality in high school. He stated, "When I got to William Bryant is when I really became aware that things were being handed down to us. The books were second hand and the laboratory equipment was second hand."[49] The hand me down customs practiced at William Bryant made inequality relevant to them. Therefore, the struggle for equality and citizenship was not an abstract exercise. It was very personal and some youth believed a necessity.

Much like the educational realities of black youth in Tifton and Americus, black youth in Moultrie understood their realities on multiple fronts. Besides dealing with the very personal reality of being given old materials, a practical component existed as well. In fact, Williams suggested that it was the practical issues that became the tipping point for their response. He stated, "The concern at that time was it was February and there was not heat . . . We had suffered through this and it was cold for a while and the conditions were just deplorable."[50] In addition to learning under circumstances that were not ideal, William Bryant lost its accreditation because of the conditions, which had very practical consequences for black youth. Although the loss of accreditation meant little to the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACS), it meant a lot to those

[49] Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012.
[50] Ibid.

who were enrolled in the school at the time.[51] Furthermore, black youth knew that the lack of improvements to their school was not a coincidence. A letter that summarizes the activity of SNCC in Moultrie began by implying that the reality black youth faced at William Bryant was not accidental. The letter stated,

> All the Negro high school students in Colquitt County go to William Bryant. The white high school, Moultrie High is unfilled; Bryant High has 750 students in space for 500. There are two accreditation associations in Georgia, Bryant has been taken off both accreditation lists—it's been off one for two years. The school board hasn't become noticeably aroused—after all Moultrie High is still accredited. The stated board of education supplies textbooks for only 600 students; the city-county board supplies none. Five buildings used for classes are substandard or condemned.[52]

Regardless if a student was coming from the rural parts of Colquitt County or the city of Moultrie, black youth who attended William Bryant faced a number of injustices that the school board was unwilling to correct.[53]

Just as whites in southwest Georgia consistently utilized the same strategies to suppress demands for equality, organizations like SNCC had effective ways to disrupt the status quo. Nonetheless, SNCC understood how political disenfranchisement and lack of economic mobility interconnected with the educational system, which inevitably

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[51]For a detailed discussion on SACS, accreditation, and black schools See Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Hello Professor: A Black Principal and Professional Leadership in the Segregated South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 81. Educational historian, Walker stated how "The Southern Association [the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools] was the accrediting agency that established standards for white schools and colleges throughout the South." She goes on to discuss how the organization accredited white schools while labeling black schools who met the criteria of accreditation as "approved." Even when the Southern Association began to accredit black schools, the organization was still noncommittal to the plight black schools faced daily.

[52] "SNCC Papers." Box 96, Folder 11

[53] Kitchen, "The School Boycott, Moultrie, Georgia." Herman Kitchen stated that "The county is getting $201,934 from the federal government for use in upgrading Colquitt County schools, and they are now trying to a legal black to prohibit or stop that money from coming into the schools on a segregated basis. The 1964 Civil Rights Act outlaws such discrimination in the application of federal funds."

determined the type of education black youth had access to.[54] While they were somewhat effective with the voter registration drive in regards to registering more people, that drive did not galvanize the youth as it had done in Americus because black youth in Moultrie already knew they wanted to focus on improving the conditions at William Bryant High. Their focus did not disregard the importance of political enfranchisement and economic mobility for their parents, but it does represent what they felt was the most salient issue at the time. Therefore, Stephen Tuck's suggestion that "In the case of Moultrie, school boycotts represented the culmination rather than the beginning of local protest" is shortsighted."[55]

Herman Kitchen, a member of SNCC and very instrumental in the Moultrie Movement, stated that "for the last past few months, Isaac and I have been working on research and organizing the community but people wouldn't work with me at first because I had to find out what they were really interested in doing. And it turned out that the kids wanted action to improve the high school."[56] Black youth focusing on educational equality was very similar to their counterparts in Tifton because their struggle was clearly defined. While Tuck was off base by stating where improving the conditions at William Bryant High ranked within the larger movement in Moultrie, he was correct with the purpose of the protest. He stated, "School boycotts were increasingly in protest at the poor equipment in the overwhelmingly black schools rather than a push for full integration."[57]

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[54] Mukasa Dada, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Atlanta, Georgia, February 1, 2012, February 1, 2012.
[55] Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (University of Georgia Press, 2003), 188.
[56] Kitchen, "The School Boycott, Moultrie, Georgia."
[57] Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 188.

It did not take long for the members of SNCC and the black students, who attended William Bryant, to agree that improving school conditions would be the focus of the Moultrie Movement. Nor did black students of William Bryant and representatives of SNCC spend a lot of time discussing an effective tactic because they knew a school boycott would get the attention of the school board. They also felt that the school board would oppose any improvements to William Bryant, which meant the protest had the possibility of being drawn out, which meant that media coverage was a possibility. If any disagreement took place, it appeared to be over when the boycott should take place. Although the correspondence from Kitchen and Isaac portray the protest in stages—SNCC galvanized students around educational improvements, they discussed strategies, then the protest occurred—it was not a seamless process. According to Holton, the boycott that eventually took place at William Bryant in 1965 was scheduled to take place in the fall of 1964. He stated,

> The summer of 1964, we continued to meet and through [spontaneous protests performed over the summer], we became a little bit more visible. I thought especially the month of July, we were going to move. We were ready to bring things down and things like that, during the summer months. Let's block out the school before school gets started in September, 1964. So we tried to meet in August and tried to get the community together, tell parents not to let their children go to school in September, let's walk out. It was a good time to do it. We had July, August kind of planned and looked at it and tried to get the people to meet and they would not show up. That was in September. We said okay, no problem. We got the Thanksgiving holiday is coming up. Let's do it again. So we go to Thanksgiving holiday, we were trying to get the people to do the mass meeting so we could block out this group because of all the condition and quality. We want equal[ity], we want to be separate but equal. We want everything, everything we need. Thanksgiving holiday passed by then we've got the Christmas holidays coming up, so now we're trying to meet and do the same thing. So we go back after Christmas holiday. We're going to block out. We go [went] to the barber [shop talking to] the guys, we are going to block out the school. Don't go to

> school. First of year [came and at the beginning of the year William Bryant was full of students.[58]

Williams noted that students' hesitancy stemmed from the conundrum in which they found themselves. On one hand, they agreed that the boycott was the most effective tool they had in addressing the issues they faced. On the other hand, they did not want to skip school because "[they] were taught that education was the way to better [themselves]."[59] Therefore, the immediacy to act differed but the general consensus was that the boycott was needed. Outside of the deplorable conditions and the accreditation issues at William Bryant, Herman Kitchen suggested that there was an economic component that persuaded students to act. He noted, "they know [referring to the students] that the county is getting $201,934 from the federal government for use in upgrading Colquitt County schools." Therefore, the protest was seen as a way to "prohibit or stop that money from coming into the schools on a segregation basis."[60] Once the urgency increased amongst the youth, organizers and leaders of the movement felt they had enough participation to have an effective protest so they began strategizing a plan that would fundamentally change William Bryant and Moultrie.

Kitchen and Isaac organized a mass meeting on February 2, 1965 at Friendship Baptist Church. The mass meeting was specifically for students and parents to discuss how they would go about demanding William Bryant be improved immediately. Kitchen stated, "We talked about immediate action and made plans for it to correct the deficiencies of the school."[61] Although there were only 20 students at the meeting and four adults, those in attendance decided that they would proceed with the boycott and the

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[58] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[59] Banister, "Pride in Color," 18.
[60] Kitchen, "The School Boycott, Moultrie, Georgia."
[61] Ibid.

students in attendance were responsible for making sure that 50 percent of the students enrolled in William Bryant participated. As the meeting adjourned, 20 black youth left determined to change the status quo. By the next morning, the Moultrie Movement had grown exponentially because of SNCC's organizational skills, but a key contributor of the increase was due to the peer recruitment by black students.

SNCC's approach of using students as recruiters worked because on February 3, 1965 a number of students at William Bryant High agreed to participate in the boycott. With a number of students willing to participate, the protest began as a sit-in. According to Mr. Kitchen, "by 9:30, there were more than 300 pupils in the hall, singing songs and demanding to have a general assembly so that they could really find out from the superintendent and principal the facts about why the school was off the accredited list and what could be done to get it back on."[62] After their request for the general assembly was denied, the sit-in quickly turned into a boycott. The boycott did not result in students leaving the premises immediately. In fact, students initially "marched around the school." The movement quickly moved beyond school grounds and quickly became an illustration that, as a SNCC member wrote, "all [blacks] were not happy down here."[63] The participation of so many youth from William Bryant illustrated that the frustration youth felt were not just felt by a few.

Even though they had a number of participants, several more students wanted to participate in the boycott but could not. In fact, a number of students who did not participate in the boycott were just as tired of the conditions at their school as their classmates who left the school. Green, whose mother forbade him to participate,

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[62] Ibid.
[63] "SNCC Papers."

remembered how he wanted to be involved in the protest. He stated, "I was 14 when they began to protest in our community so my mother wouldn't allow me to march. I did things behind her back when she was at work but I didn't go to meetings and things like that because she didn't want me to go to jail."[64]An article published in the *Moultrie Observer* illuminated the desire many had to participate in the boycott but they were not able or willing to defy their parents. The article stated that "several students stayed behind because they had been disallowed from marching by their parents."[65] Sensitive to the predicament of a number of students, youth leaders of the movement did not force students who were told by their parents not to participate. Besides, they had recruited enough students that the boycott greatly affected the day to day operations at William Bryant. The effect was twofold, one "the county was losing $1500 or so every day because the students were out of school;" two, the students who remained at William Bryant were oblivious to what was going on inside the school because they were "busy looking wistfully out the windows at the march past."[66]

### No Turning Back

An idea that started with 20 students, 4 parents, and a couple of members from SNCC had metamorphosed into a movement about equality. So after several hours of negotiations, more than 500 students walked out of the dilapidated and non-accredited school and vowed not to return until their demands were met. Black youth wanted the superintendent to meet them at William Bryant High but once that request was not granted "they decided to march to the courthouse . . . hand-in-hand, in silence, in a line

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[64] Green Jr, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 15, 2012.
[65] Banister, "Pride in Color," 14.
[66] Parry, "SNCC Papers."

three blocks alone."[67] On their way to the courthouse, these black students experienced, like others before them, racial epithets and aggressive arrests. The racial epithets primarily came from white onlookers who believed that black youth challenging the ethos of Moultrie was unacceptable. Therefore, a march to the courthouse demanding "more teachers, more books and a better school" warranted the same verbal abuse as those who attempted to integrate white schools because, in the minds of many whites, it was a direct attack on their way of life.[68]

Verbal abuse was a common method used but so too were aggressive arrests. Police did not just arrest black youth in a respectful or humanly manner. The arrests were done in a way that was dehumanizing and intended to send a message. Immediately after the protest began, the police and the superintendent tried to squelch the protest without addressing the student's concerns by not simply arresting the students but arresting them in a manner that would discourage others from participating in the boycott. When students did not respond to the superintendent's efforts to squelch the protest, according to the *Moultrie Observer* "the police began arresting students and Deputy Sheriff Dennis McCorvey was hit by a brick." The brick was thrown because the "police announced that the grounds would be cleared by whatever means necessary and they called in another three or four cars of city and county cops." Surely the students' fears were heightened by the presence of the authority and the threat escalated those fears. However, the students also believed that "this was their school and they were the only ones trying to make it

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*; Klarman, *Unfinished Business*; Clive Webb, *Massive Resistance*; Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton University Press, 2007).

better."[69] The officers were seen as a hindrance. So once officers entered the school, the tone of the protest changed dramatically.

A student who attended William Bryant remembered the incident and stated,

> As cops began to arrest us, a number of us sat down as a way to make it more difficult for the cops. However, the cops grabbed and started dragging, aiming for doorposts, rocks, dragging us along the ground, not even trying to lift us. One cop [kicked] my head as I was pulled by. They did the same with others. Kids kept singing, though they cried. As the first girl was dragged out, one boy couldn't accept this kind of treatment, yelled 'You can't do that,' picked up a rock, and threw it at the cop. They took out after him with guns drawn, and, from their talk, would cheerfully have killed him if they could have gotten a shot. Another girl grabbed and carried by the head, bit one cop in the side.[70]

Regardless of the confrontational method used by a few students, by and large the police were the aggressors. The aggression did not end with the arrests of 300 students. Similar to Americus, black youth endured constant hostility once they arrived at the police station. Two SNCC workers were arrested and the two of them "were in a cell for eight" whereas "the [other] cells the same size, but had double-decker bunks, and so 'designed for 16' they crammed 33 girls into one, with no light, and for several hours no heat."[71] The message that the superintendent and the police tried to send to the students was a lesson their parents were afraid they would learn which was that the status quo would be protected. The protest was only in its second day, and it had faced massive opposition. However, black students had shown the authorities and the white school board that they were not easily frightened and had no intentions of turning back.

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[69] "SNCC Papers"; Banister, "Pride in Color." Although the students were taught non-violence by SNCC, those who remembered the incident noted that the limited violence used was out of fear and not a change in strategy. A correspondence from a member of SNCC explained why the student threw a brick. When the police were called to William Bryant

[70] Banister, "Pride in Color."

[71] Parry, "SNCC Papers." The letter also revealed that Herman Kitchen, another member of SNCC, was arrested and placed in a cell called the "Buzzard Roost," solitary confinement, not large enough to stand up in . . . he was also fed only bread and water."

In the face of fierce opposition, students from Moultrie remained undeterred to see equal education, as they defined it, materialize in Moultrie. What increased the resolve of the participants in the movement was the solidarity that had developed at the beginning of the movement and increased as the movement went on. Students at William Bryant already had deplorable school conditions as a unifying factor and the backlash they received for demanding better conditions and accreditation reiterated the importance of unification. Holton stated, "The most important thing we had to do and we stood on this, was to be united. We were united as a race of people. In other words we came together and showed some solidarity."[72] The solidarity displayed by black youth was pivotal to the boycott continuing because white officials were definitely unified.

An example that illuminates the solidarity that existed amongst black youth and between black youth and members of SNCC was everyone's willingness to remain in jail. Twenty-four hours had not passed before the organizers, the leaders, and the participants of the movement were arrested and jailed. Despite the horrid conditions and the necessity to keep the protest going, everyone who was arrested decided to remain in jail until everyone was released. This undoubtedly put the boycott in grave danger but everyone understood the importance of filling the jail. So when the bond for youth was set at $22.00, "all were determined to stay until all got out. Five or six parents insisted on bailing their children out, but several refused to leave." Staying in jail oftentimes was the unifying factor but youth only had so much autonomy. Therefore, when some were forced by their parents to be bailed out a number of them made sure they "stopped by their colleagues' cell to tell them they didn't want to leave and that they'd be back as

[72] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.

soon as possible."[73] Youth being totally committed to their comrades and being obedient to their parents often faced a difficult dilemma. For example, when Robert Shields parents forbade him to take part in any more demonstrations and ordered him to return to school, he left home and moved in with a friend."[74] While the case of Shields is definitely not a typical response, his reaction and the reaction of those forced out of jail by their parents provide a great portrait of the solidarity that existed during the period.

Another illustration that exemplified the harmonious nature of the boycott occurred days later. On February 5, 1965, nearly 300 other students marched to the courthouse demanding the release, along with the initial demands made by the students who were now in jail, of all parties affiliated with the William Bryant High boycott. Mr. Willie Ricks, told the chief of police that if "they weren't out by 3:00 there would be three hundred more coming in."[75] In addition to threatening the chief of police that more students would protest if those in jail were not released, he stated that "if equal resources were not funneled to the black high school, they would be in the white school Monday morning getting it."[76] At the time, the threat may have seemed to be an idle one, but it was not because several parents filled out applications for their child to transfer to the white high school. This tactic was employed to bring attention to the discrepancies that existed between William Bryant and Moultrie High. Both approaches were successful because the purpose of students flooding the jail or flooding white schools was the same. Neither approach deviated from its unifying message which forced white school officials to make some concessions. By Friday evening, "all of the [youth] and Herman [Kitchen]

[73] Parry, "SNCC Papers."
[74] Ibid.
[75] Dada, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 8, 2012; Parry, "SNCC Papers."
[76] Harris, "SNCC Papers"; Dada, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 8, 2012; Banister, "Pride in Color."

were out of jail." The chief of police attempted to hold two SNCC workers but once the students made a fuss of that they eventually released the last two.[77] Although the boycott was still in its early stages, black youth felt that they had accomplished a great feat. Mr. Parry described the mood after the release of the boycott participants as "everybody was happy . . . the feeling was different this time, like that of a victory parade after a football game because things started to happen." [78]

Besides getting the participants being released from jail, *The Moultrie Observer* noted "the Moultrie School Board of Education agreed to meet with spokesmen from William Bryant and agree[d] to certain request."[79] The request that school officials agreed to—implement a desegregation plan, work on restoring William Bryant's accreditation, pave the roads around the school—fell short of all the demands so students remained out of school. The concessions that students forced the school board to make were transitory because, by Sunday, school officials began diluting the seriousness of the boycott by implying that the conditions of William Bryant were not as bad as the students implied. The superintendent stated that "some of William Bryant's facilities are among the more modern structures in the city system." He also denied the student's claim of being housed in a condemned building."[80] Instead of the school board addressing the deplorable conditions at the black high school, they spent nearly a week dismissing the educational experiences black youth endured for years. In a very direct way, the superintendent attempted to disavow the school board's negligence as a legitimate reason for the protest by trivializing the boycott.

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[77] Parry, "SNCC Papers"; Banister, "Pride in Color."
[78] Parry, "SNCC Papers."
[79] "Local Officials Agree to Some Negro Requests," *The Moultrie Observer*, February 5, 1965.
[80] Banister, "Pride in Color," 17.

The plan to dismiss the boycott did not work because external agencies came to Moultrie and validated the claims made by black youth. One of those outside organizations was the Georgia Teacher and Education Association (GTEA). Dr. Horace Tate, executive secretary of GTEA, requested Dr. Claude Purcell, the state superintendent, send representatives to Moultrie to investigate the conditions at William Bryant, and Dr. Purcell granted Dr. Tate's request. Members of GTEA conducted a thorough investigation which lasted two-days and found that "inadequacies exist[ed]."[81] While GTEA performed their external investigation, black youth continued to put pressure on local politicians and school officials. From February 8th through February 11th, black youth marched to the superintendent's office demanding that the inadequacies GTEA verified be addressed. On February 9th, the school board made some concessions. According to *The Moultrie Observer* and a number of SNCC files, "the board approved the purchase of 157 desks and $200 worth of library books." They also "promised $4,000 to blacktop the campus" which Kitchen noted "would not pave a small room."[82] Nearly a week after the boycott began and a few days after the investigation performed by GTEA, school officials continued to refused to address the students' core demands and the ones they did address, did little to change the educational experiences of black youth or the racial climate of Moultrie.

After the investigation, school officials no longer attempted to dismiss the conditions at William Bryant. Instead of going back and forth with GTEA, they noted that students were breaking the truancy law so if they continued to boycott, parents would be fined and students who refused to attend school were arrested. While this was another

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[81] Banister, "Pride in Color"; "Local Officials Agree to Some Negro Requests."
[82] Banister, "Pride in Color"; Harris, "SNCC Papers"; Kitchen, "The School Boycott, Moultrie, Georgia."

attempt to force black students back to class, it only increased their resolve. From February 10th through February 17th, nearly 400 students were arrested for being truant and the attendance at William Bryant High dropped below 10%. According to Parry, black Moultrians viewed the superintendent's execution of the truancy law a way to diffuse the boycott so again black parents responded by attempting to enroll their children in the white school. He noted, "the law said that the children must be enrolled in a school." So when black parents requested transfers they were all denied.[83] Given the fact that every black parent was turned away, it is evident that school officials were more concerned with the boycott ending than improving the educational conditions black youth faced. However, after weeks of circumventing the demands made by black students, school officials began addressing some of the issues that caused the movement.

On February 22, the majority of the students returned to William Bryant High with the expectations that most of their demands would be met. Holton noted that he remembered after the boycott ended "they finally got some [new] books and some maintenance work done on the building." [84]Although Kitchen thought that anything apart from a new school was not good enough, other members of SNCC noted victories from the boycott. A letter discussing the Moultrie Movement noted that "improvements to a large extent occurred. The school board was forced to hire teachers, buy books, start paving roads and landscaping the grounds. [They were also forced] to file an integration plan and bring the school up to standards such that it would be reaccredited."[85] Although students had fought for weeks for so much more, the boycott forced school officials to address some of the concerns put forth by the students at William Bryant.

[83] Parry, "SNCC Papers."
[84] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[85] "SNCC Papers"; Kitchen, "The School Boycott, Moultrie, Georgia."

## Incomplete

Forcing officials to concede certain social norms and transforming a system are not the same. The results may look similar but concession and transformation are very different. A number of black youth who participated in the boycott understood that the only leverage they had in transforming the system was the boycott. Holton, in particular, said he tried to keep the boycott alive because he believed once the students reentered William Bryant that the Moultrie movement would shift from transformational to concessional.  He had also seen the movement switched from a student-led protest to an adult one which he believed was detrimental to their cause. He stated, "We got tricked, we were doing good . . . the boycott was a successful tool to get what we wanted because we shut the whole system down."[86] As long as the boycott was alive, schools, black and white, did not function fully because school officials had to spend so much of their attention and resources on the students at William Bryant. Ironically, the concessions made by the school board brought some form of normalcy to Moultrie, which was not necessarily beneficial to black students.

Holton was not the only participant who felt that returning to school was not in the best interests of the students. Williams noted that by the time the decision was made to return to campus "we had not accomplished what we were after."[87]  Black youth wanted equality and they were not concerned with how long it took to obtain it but school officials and a growing segment of the black community were. Although black youth could wait school officials out because the evidence sided with them, their parents did not have that luxury. Unlike the students who participated, a number of adults had an

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[86] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.
[87] Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012.

economic penalty associated with the boycott. Parents were penalized for their child's involvement so the concessions they were willing to accept put them at odds with a number of youth, particularly Holton. Besides believing that once his classmates reentered the school they would not come back out, he also believed that most of the parents accepted the improvements proposed by the school board because they were scared. He noted, "we got what we call bootlicking leaders" who were in charge of the talks to end the boycott and they came up with the agreement that if students returned to class then the improvements to William Bryant would occur.[88] Whether students return to William Bryant was due to the shift in leadership, the economic penalty, or a mixture of three is debatable. However, those who participated in the movement agree that the movement lost a lot of momentum once the students returned to school. Undoubtedly the boycott accomplished a great deal but one can only wonder if black youth were able to force a school system that was so beholden to the customs of Jim Crow to concede on a number of traditions in two weeks, what transformational changes could have occurred if the boycott could have continued for months.

[88] Holton, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, July 20, 2012.

## Chapter 6
## When Desegregation was not Enough

> The rule of law is only something on paper until it's challenged, until people are made to get it right. If that means overflowing their jails, if it means boycotting their retail establishments or whatever, something has to be done.
> —Ms. Lorena Sabbs[1]

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson was elected the 36th president of the United States of America. A year later, he gave the commencement address at Howard University, entitled "To Fulfill these Rights," where he touted initiatives for his Great Society program and how his programs benefited the majority black audience. In addition to publicizing his initiatives, President Johnson discussed why such programs were needed. He stated, "Freedom is not enough, you do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please." The president explained why solely granting someone freedom was not enough by stating, "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair."[2]

The philosophy of being able to legislate fairness did not originate with President Johnson. Passing federal rulings as a way to correct the racial injustices that plagued the

[1] Lorena Sabbs, Follow-up Interview with the author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, July 23, 2012, July 23, 2012.
[2] "President Lyndon B. Johnson's Commencement Address at Howard University: 'To Fulfill These Rights' June 4, 1965," accessed February 13, 2013, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/speeches.hom/650604.asp.

United States of America was common for the time period. Johnson's predecessors—President John F. Kennedy and President Dwight Eisenhower—also believed that federal rulings could cure the systematic unfairness caused by centuries of racism. Hence, the decision of the court in *Brown vs. Board of Education* under the Eisenhower Administration and the early drafting of the Civil Rights Act under the Kennedy Administration.

While these acts are often overly critiqued for not going far enough or over praised for ending racial inequities, the commonality of the actions was they fostered new possibilities about equality and citizenship. Prior to these actions, for the most part, blacks were legally separated and often barred from the decision-making process regarding education, politics, and economics. Their separation and disbarment had real consequences. Black schools were often underfunded or not funded at all. Black adults were not allowed to vote and most of them held jobs with little means of economic mobilization. However, federal rulings between the mid-1950s and in the 1960s created new possibilities blacks could only envision prior to the outlawing of segregation and discrimination in public schools, public facilities, and political disenfranchisement.[3]

Despite the new possibilities the court rulings created for blacks, each decision faced fierce opposition from local officials and a large segment of the white population because a number of them saw the decision as an infringement on their way of life. Jason Sokol stated, "As whites clung to discriminatory ideas and practices, their 'problem' gained in depth and intensity . . . Blacks decided to risk all for freedom, and whites had to

[3] Henry Louis Gates et al., eds., *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship, 1865-Present*, Oxford Handbooks in Politics & International Relations; (New York ; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

respond."[4] So as whites responded locally, the degree to which federal rulings could cure centuries of injustices was invariably affected. Instead of the rulings becoming a partnership between federal and local officials, they became points of contentiousness. Throughout the period, federal rulings rarely fulfilled their purpose but most of that can be attributed to the opposition they faced.

Regardless of how sincere officials were when they passed landmark rulings, the implementation of the decision was usually carried out by local officials. Therefore, federal actions cannot be examined exclusively through a national lens. Although the implementation and the opposition to *Brown* occurred on different levels in Arkansas and in Georgia, the leaders in each state were determined to maintain a system in which the ideals of Jim Crow prevailed, even when the system was forced to compromise. An in depth analysis revealed white opposition was not isolated to a few states. In fact, Gary Orfield noted, "Not long after the Supreme Court outlawed segregated schools, the job of racially integrating those schools proved not only politically unpopular but difficulty in a practical sense as well."[5] When segregation, discrimination, and political disenfranchisement were ruled unconstitutional, state officials, particularly those in the South, attempted to ignore, circumvent, or meet the minimum requirements of the rulings. Unfortunately, state officials and local laypeople were not as concerned with addressing the injustices that were rampant throughout the country. Their lack of concern had profound consequences for the educational experiences of black youth, the economic and social mobility of the black community, and blacks' political influence.

[4] Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 350.
[5] Gary Orfield, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown V. Board of Education* (New Press, 1996), 143.

Many who hoped federal rulings would bring new opportunities quickly realized that decisions were one thing and implementation was something totally different. This was definitely on display in Georgia. Stephen Tuck noted, "The history of Georgia sheds light on how local movements emerged and developed."[6] From Herman Talmadge to Carl E. Sanders, state officials made it clear that Georgia officials had no intentions of willfully doing away with practices President Johnson deemed counterintuitive for a great society.[7] Furthermore, state and local leaders made it more painfully clear that they had no intentions of accepting federal mandates to aid in the equalization of American or Georgian society. Invariably, this created a conundrum because federal rulings granted blacks' access into arenas they been denied for centuries but states, like Georgia, disregarded those rulings for decades.

Prior to the 1960s, the majority of black Georgians remained confined to the margins of society. Second-class education, segregation, economic stagnation, and political disenfranchisement were too common for a number of black communities, particularly smaller metropolises like Albany, Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie. Federal rulings did very little to move blacks away from the margins because the landmark rulings were ignored. Georgia, a very influential southern state, made it clear that it had very little intention of desegregating public schools, providing blacks access to public facilities, or removing the barriers that made it difficult for blacks to exercise their right to vote. White Georgians—politicians, leaders, parents, students, and administrators—

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[6] Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (University of Georgia Press, 2003), 245.

[7] General Editor Oscar H. Joiner et al., eds., *A History of Public Education in Georgia 1734-1976* (R. L. Bryan Company, 1979); Coleman, Kenneth, *A History of Georgia*, 2nd ed. (University of Georgia Press, 1991); Alton Hornsby, "Black Public Education in Atlanta, Georgia, 1954-1973: From Segregation to Segregation," *The Journal of Negro History* 76, no. 1/4 (January 1, 1991): 21–47.

were loyal to the customs of Jim Crow, and it would take more than several landmark rulings for them to be persuaded that there was life after Jim Crow.

Undoubtedly federal rulings and white opposition are essential for contextualizing education, race relations, social norms, economic opportunities and political disenfranchisement during a unique time in American history. However, to understand how these elements changed during the period, the activism of black youth and national organizations have to be infused into the conversation. Regardless of the courage displayed by national politicians, like Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, and others, it was black youth and young black adults going into primary and secondary schools and public universities that made *Brown* somewhat of a reality. Furthermore, it was youth along with organizations like the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who registered people to vote so the Voting Rights Act could be enacted. And it was the youth who picketed and marched for better housing, better jobs, and access to public facilities. While federal rulings and legislations gave blacks the legal high ground, the onus was largely left up to blacks to see those rulings implemented. In addition to being responsible for the implementation of the rulings, blacks were also responsible for changing the minds and hearts of local whites. Examining the activism of black youth through a national and local context illuminates how they constantly pushed federal rulings to go further and pushed back against opposition they felt denied any component of their citizenship.

Despite the federal actions, blacks remained the burden-bearers for various forms of fairness to be implemented. Although this responsibility did not originate during the mid-twentieth century, the role changed dramatically during this period. Prior to the mid-

1900s, blacks, for the most part, advocated for equality and citizenship using legal avenues, gradualism, and self-help. However, those who took up the mantle during the mid-twentieth century accepted the responsibility of being the ones who would make sure fairness occurred but the characteristics changed considerably. Blacks, particularly the young, continued to use the courts and self-help as means to achieve equality but gradualism was rarely accepted. As more youth became involved in the struggle, more urgency replaced gradualism. Consequently, direct-action became the most prevalent form of protest towards the end of the 1950s throughout the 60s and early 70s which invariably changed the tenor of the period. The change in tone can be directly attributed to the frustration a number of black communities felt because federal rulings and federal legislation made little impact locally.

As more black youth felt compelled to respond to the social and political ills they faced, the less the movement became about what federal rulings were not doing and more about what local officials were not allowing to occur. They, along with organizations like SNCC and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), indicted local leaders and local citizens as perpetrators of a system that promoted inequality. Therefore, black students did not spend an inordinate amount of time critiquing national politicians or federal officials because the legal arena was no longer the problem. By the time a large number of youth decided to join the freedom struggle, blacks legally had the right to vote and to attend the school of their choosing. However, the social norms that were practiced locally made these rights all but impossible. This dynamic essentially transformed a top-down movement—where the federal government and national organizations used

legislation to achieve equality—to a bottom-up localized movement—where equality would be gained through various degrees of protests.

This is not to say that local blacks, particularly black youth, excused national leaders for their inactions and often passive compromises. For example, the second year of the national event, "Youth March for Integrated Schools," portrays how federal officials were not immune to criticism. A. Phillip Randolph and a number of youth participants critiqued President Eisenhower for his non-visibility at the event. Additionally, President Kennedy was criticized for his refusal to protect the Freedom Riders and President Johnson was criticized for not aiding the marchers crossing Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama.[8] So by no means was the federal government excused from blacks being left to largely fend for themselves. However, the reality of the period was that the federal government assumed the position of legislator and occasionally provided protection, as was the case in Little Rock. Although a number of blacks took issue with this arrangement, they took solace in the fact that the majority of the federal actions during this period sided with the cause for equality.

As movements sprang up throughout the South, specifically in Georgia, it was clear that blacks were responsible for the execution of equality. Another thing that was quite clear was desegregation was not enough. By the 1960s, participants in the movement had enough evidence that desegregation alone was not going to alleviate a

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[8] Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, USA, 2011); National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *NAACP Administrative File. General Office File. Youth March on Washington, 1958-September 1959*, Papers of the NAACP. Part 24, Special Subjects, 1956-1965. Series C: Life memberships--Zangrando ;; Reel 41, Fr. 0448-0682; Variation: Papers of the NAACP.; Part 24,; Special Subjects, 1956-1965. Series C: Life memberships--Zangrando ;; Reel 41, Fr. 0448-0682. (Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1997); Charles M Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 1996); Hasan Kwame Jeffries, *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

large amount of their educational, social, economic, and political suffering. In fact, desegregation was one of many elements local white Georgians opposed. They opposed voting rights for blacks, economic mobility, better treatment for blacks, and improving the conditions of black schools. In essence, an examination of Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie illuminates why desegregation was not enough and how educational inequities, voter suppression, and economic stagnation were interconnected struggles that played out throughout southwest Georgia.

## Lessons Learned

The story of how black youth refused to accept inequality, specifically unequal education, in the aftermath of *Brown* is as much an indictment of America's public school system as it is an examination of the ways in which black students' advocated for equal education. Unfortunately, black youth faced a matrix of educational inequities from 1954-1972 because whites' refused to accept a number of rulings that were passed to improve the lives of blacks. Several newspaper articles depicted how white resistance was instrumental in creating an educational climate that was not beneficial to black students. Oftentimes, they were met with hostility from white students, parents, and administrators. Too often, black youth were surrounded by prevailing educational conditions that sought to subordinate and not educate. Ironically, the hostile nature of public schools, particularly in the South, influenced the activism of countless black youth.

Gael Graham suggested that "high school students absorbed the lessons and messages drawn from outside societal conflicts at the same time that local conditions

galvanized them to respond to specific issues."[9] She is correct that a number of factors contributed to the activism of black youth. Hence, black youth attending public schools in southwest Georgia, routinely responded to educational inequities that they found most egregious. Several lessons can be learned by examining their activism.

One pivotal lesson learned was how black students spent a lot of energy on improving the educational conditions of their schools. When the movement reached Tifton, leaders were able to galvanize the students around getting better resources for their school. While federal actions were trying to enforce *Brown*, one of the earliest forms of activism that took place in southwest Georgia focused mainly on improving the resources that were being funneled into the school. Alton Pertilla, Walter Dykes, Johnny Terrell, and Major Wright all noted that what made them get involved in the movement was the personal connection they had with their school and how it was important to see the conditions improve. They also noted how black students equated the second-hand materials and the lack of resources as a reflection of how the local school board viewed them as citizens. As youth, they all noted how limited resources along with the inequities their parents faced meant that they were not viewed as citizens. Given the fact that students equated resources with equality and full citizenship, it is not surprising that the demands made by young black Tiftonians during this period focused primarily on improving the resources at their school. Of course, their fight for educational facilities also improved life in other areas, such as voter participation. The Tifton experience is one example of how youth forced local officials to concede on some of the practices of Jim

[9] Graham, *Young Activists*, 198.

Crow and it illuminates how progress and regress continued to occupy the same space during the early 1970s.

The protest that took place in Americus revealed how important black youth believed equal treatment was to the overall struggle of equality. Youth in Americus realized shortly after joining the movement that the acceptance of one's humanity could not be legislated. When several black female adolescents and teenagers were thrown in the Leesburg County barracks and treated in an inhumane way, other students became inspired to join the movement. Although the students were eventually released, the images of young females being treated in such a way stained Americus. In addition to the inhumane treatment the "Stolen Girls" faced, the protest at Staley had profound consequences on the public school system in Americus. Like Tifton, Americus eventually had to make concessions which meant Jim Crow no longer reigned supreme.

When black youth in Americus fought to have their humanity recognized they attacked the core of segregation. The ideals of segregation in Americus, in southwest Georgia, in the state of Georgia, and throughout the South were that blacks were less than whites. While they were successful in moving local whites away from the fringe elements of Jim Crow, they did not eradicate the ideals of the segregated system entirely. This can be seen through the experiences of those who were the first to desegregate the previously white schools. From Robertina Freeman to Lorena Sabbs, white officials, white administrators, white teachers, and white students' reiterated these ideas as they attempted to desegregate Americus High. Sabbs recalled their experiences this way, "we were smart kids, talented kids but we never got to sing in a band, we never got a chance to be on the cheerleading squad, we never got to be queens and football or basketball

players."[10] Even though all of these limitations would eventually be done away with and some tout this as improvements, Sabbs said she believes sheer numbers changed the climate of desegregation. The more blacks enrolled in previously white schools the more emboldened they became and whites became less confrontational. She noted that whites could intimidate a few blacks but not hundreds. She believed this was the case for other arenas as well. In Americus, the more blacks registered to vote and the more blacks fought for better jobs, Jim Crow became more crippled.

Similar to Tifton and Americus, the student protest at William Bryant High School in Moultrie provides another lesson on what black youth found important and why they were willing to be suspended, jailed, and ostracized. They, also, found being forced to attend school under such horrid conditions illegal and as well as failing to recognize them as human beings. The boycott that occurred at William Bryant was solely about improvements which they defined as educational equality. Parallel to the activism taking place in neighboring cities, black youth in Moultrie did not focus on desegregation because they had no desire to attend the nearby white school. Furthermore, blacks understood that desegregation came at a price.[11] For example, when Moultrie adopted Freedom of Choice a number of black students, like Dale Williams, remained at William Bryant because he wanted to play quarterback.[12] During this period, there was an accepted belief that blacks were not capable of playing quarterback which permeated throughout Moultrie. Therefore, black students, for the most part, remained at William

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[10] Lorena Sabbs, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Americus, Georgia, March 5, 2012, March 5, 2012.

[11] Vivian Gunn Morris, *The Price They Paid: Desegregation in an African American Community* (Teachers College Press, 2002).

[12] Dale Williams, Interview with author, Audio Recording, Moultrie, Georgia, March 18, 2012, March 18, 2012.

Bryant committed to improving the conditions there until the federal government forced desegregation in the early 1970s.

Researching the activism of black youth reveals the simple way they defined equal education. The data suggest that through their activism they operationalized and conceptualized what equal education meant. Oral histories and archival data are clear about what black youth Post-*Brown* expected. They did not seek the implementation of the *Brown* decision as much as they sought equality, whether attending a white school or a black school. Furthermore, they were motivated by the larger Civil Rights Movement and the inability of their parents to act. More than that, they did not separate educational ideas from other forms of inequality. These points were illuminated in Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie.

This study also reveals the complex relationship between civil rights organizations and student activism. We have heard the story of black youth being influenced by organizations or just mimicking organizations; however, exploring the relationship between black students and organizations portrays a more complex scenario. Black youth were indeed influenced by organizations and mirrored some of their ways, but they also influenced organizations as well. Scott Baker discussed how the energy and perseverance of the youth motivated organizations to stay involved when morale in the local community was low.[13]

Just as black youth gave national organizations a jolt when needed, SNCC and the SCLC gave students a place where their ideas were cultivated and appreciated, as David

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[13] R. Scott Baker, *Paradoxes of Desegregation: African American Struggles for Educational Equity in Charleston, South Carolina, 1926-1972* (University of South Carolina Press, 2006).

Cecelski and Dionne Danns have pointed out.[14] Therefore, the relationship that existed between black youth and national organizations was essential to the struggle for equality. Their mutual interests in fighting against an oppressive system created a relationship that was connected through circumstances and shared ideologies. As a result of this relationship, black youth knew that when they fought against educational injustices they could depend on the SNCC and SCLC for physical and emotional support. Likewise, national organizations recognized they could count on black youth when they needed people to protest against any form of segregation. It is true that Mr. Major Wright and Mr. Willie Ricks faced a different set of obstacles; however, black youth and organizations recognized that the obstacles were caused by the same oppressive system, so several examples exist where they joined forces to fight against a tyrannical system.

Findings for this study extend the literature of American education in general and black education specifically by examining the different ways black youth participated in the struggle for equal education. This dissertation has extended the literature by illuminating several ideas. First, the national stories of black youth entering white schools, such as the Little Rock Nine, and being treated in a hostile manner but persevering was actually the experience of countless black students throughout the South. This is not to suggest that the Little Rock Nine should not be celebrated; however, this study does show that more black youth need to be recognized for their bravery and courage. In particular, the bravery of black youth still trapped in black schools needs to be included in the literature. This study portrays how black students' experienced educational injustices after *Brown* and the various responses they had to those injustices,

[14] David S Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Dionne Danns, *Something Better for Our Children: Black Organization in the Chicago Public Schools, 1963-1971*, 1st ed. (Routledge, 2002).

including using direct actions. Second, examining how black youth were supported by national organizations expands the literature because few scholars have explored how important this relationship was to the Civil Rights/Black Power Movement and the struggle to make public schools more equitable. In summary, this dissertation has attempted to extend the literature by challenging long held beliefs about the progressivism of American education after *Brown*, while extending our understanding of student activism as it relates to public education.

Importantly, this study shows how the innocence of youth embodied in havens of childhood was taken away from black students by a very oppressive system. Black youth could not just enjoy their adolescence because the educational system, along with societal norms, reinforced that they were different and less than humans or Americans. Therefore, the primary indictment of public schools during the post-*Brown* era was its failure to create a climate in which black youth could be celebrated. Unfortunately, black students could not live so calmly because they were needed to be warriors in the fight for freedom.[15]

**Implications**

Many aspects of the story are untold in this work. A glaring omission of this study is a thorough examination of how the Black Power Movement (BPM) permeated Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie. Future studies should examine how certain characteristics of the BPM were portrayed in southwest Georgia. Considering SNCC's relationship with black youth, future studies should investigate if black youth had the same philosophical shift in the mid-1960s.

[15] For more information on how the childhood of black children was affected by racial injustices read Beals, *Warriors don't Cry*.

Furthermore, future studies should investigate the relationships between the adult organizations, considering specifically, how they functioned in cooperative ways, or contradictory ways to support black education. The study also focuses primarily on the students who were leaders in these settings. Understanding the perspective of the other students, as well as parents, would provide an important additional lens through which to investigate the events. Likewise, while the intent of school boards is surmised based on their actions, interviews with school board members and former white students would also contextualize the story in important ways.

Georgia, of course, and the three areas in particular, provide only a single geographic lens through which to understand the larger story of youth activism. Additional studies should expand the geographic area. A geographic expansion allows the activism of black youth to be seen on a continuum. Furthermore, examining other areas may portray different forms of opposition black students' faced and how different states' desire to remain loyal to the customs of Jim Crow profoundly affected the educational experiences of black youth.

## Appendix A

## Sample of Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me what your earlier educational experiences where like?

2. How do you remember *Brown* being discussed? Under what circumstances did you come to understand *Brown vs. Board of Education*? What conversation did you have about desegregation?

3. Did you experience any form of white opposition during your educational experience? If so, please describe.

4. Do you feel like white opposition affected your educational experience?

5. In what ways did you respond to white opposition?

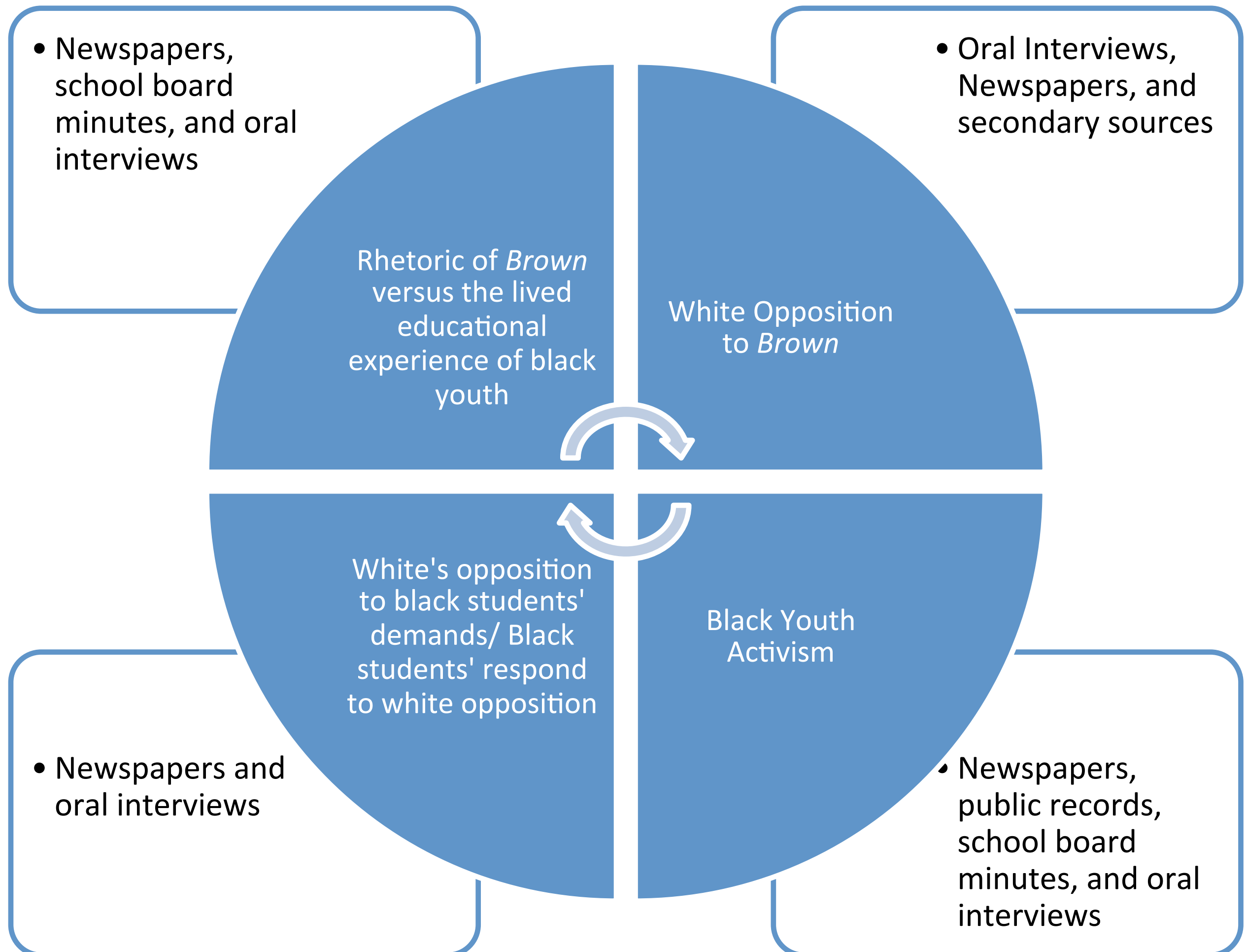
    a. What forms did this resistance take (conversations, protest, and/or sit-ins)?
    b. Were the responses individually done or collective?
    c. What influenced your response?

6. What was the extent of your knowledge and involvement with Civil Rights/Black Power organizations?

7. How did this knowledge influence your activism?

8. Were you getting your strategies from the organizations or did you take your strategies with you?

**Appendix B**
**Research Questions and Sources for Dissertation**



## Appendix C

## Document Summary Form

Site: ________________

Document: ________________

Date received/reviewed/picked up: ___________________

**Initial Review**[1]

Name or description of document:

Event or contract, if any, with which document is associated:

Significance or importance of document:

Brief summary of contents:

[1] Adopted from Matthew B. Miles and A Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 55.

## Appendix D

## Biographies of Participants

Alan Anderson was born and raised in Sumter County. He has spent most of his adult life archiving the history of Sumter County and Americus, Georgia. Anderson is the co-founder of the Sumter Historic Trust. He is also responsible for chronicling the history of the civil rights struggle that took place in Sumter and Americus.

Mukasa Dada (Willie Ricks) was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He moved to Atlanta, Georgia when he was nineteen years old to join “the movement.” Mr. Dada joined the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) shortly after arriving in Atlanta and worked with students in Americus and Moultrie, Georgia. Since the 1960s, Mr. Dada has remained involved in grassroots activism both locally and abroad.

Walter Dykes was born in Tifton, Georgia and graduated from Wilson High School. He is credited for initiating the student movement in Tifton and establishing the first Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) chapter in Tifton. He left Americus shortly after graduating and joined the Army. Mr. Dykes spent a lot of his adult life in California but he has returned home to Tifton.

J. W. Green Jr. was born in Moultrie, Georgia. He attended and graduated William Bryant High School. After graduating from college, Reverend Green Jr. returned to Moultrie where he taught in the Colquitt County School System for thirty years. He retired in 2002. Green Jr. is also an ordained minister and is the pastor of Live Oak M.B. Church.

Jimmy Holton was born is Moultrie, Georgia and a graduate of William Bryant High School. He is credited for starting the youth movement in Moultrie. After graduating from William Bryant he attended Albany State University and received his B.S. in Elementary Education. For years, Mr. Holton worked for the United States Postal Services and retired in 2004. He also worked as an Instructional Provider at Cox Elementary in Moultrie.

Sam Mahone was born in Americus, Georgia and graduated from Sumter High School. He joined the Americus Movement as a teenager and remained active in the civil rights movement well into the late-1960s and early 1970s. He moved to Mississippi and attended Tougaloo College, under SNCC’s educational assistance program. Mr. Mahone resides in Atlanta and works for the High Museum of Art.

Saundra Mansfield was born in Americus, Georgia and attended Staley Junior High School. She was one of the first black students to integrate Americus High during segregation. Ms. Mansfield is mostly known for her involvement in the Americus Movement. She spent her adult life working at Georgia Southwestern College and Tripp Street Laundromat, as a custodian, and giving speeches, across the country, about her struggle for equality.

Johnny McBurrows was born in Colquitt County and graduated from William Bryant High School. He moved to Atlanta shortly after graduating to answer his calling into the ministry. Reverend McBurrows is the senior pastor of Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church in Dallas, Georgia. He also teaches courses at the Carroll-Douglas Bible Extension School.

Alton Pertilla was born and raised in Tifton, Georgia. He graduated from Wilson High School then joined the Army. After leaving the Army, Mr. Pertilla moved to Harlem, New York and participated in a number of social advocacy events taking place during the period. He recently moved back to Tifton to care for his ailing mother but he remains heavily involved in the "politics of his community."

Lorena Sabbs was born in Americus, Georgia and attended Staley Junior High. She was one of the first African Americans to graduate from Americus High. Mrs. Sabbs left Americus and worked for years in corporate America. She eventually returned to Americus to run the family business, Barnum Funeral Home, which was a mainstay for the Americus Movement.

Charles Sherrod was born in St. Petersburg, Virginia. He arrived in Albany in the early-1960 and joined SNCC. Mr. Sherrod was pivotal in the Albany Movement which sprang movements in Tifton, Americus, and Moultrie. He remains important to the Albany community as illustrated by his purchase of the Cypress Pond Planation.

Johnny Terrell was born in Tifton, Georgia. He attended and graduated from Industrial Elementary and Wilson High School. Mr. Terrell was very involved in the Tifton Movement as a student. As an adult, he has continued to serve is constituents. He has held a number of elected and appointed positions in Tifton. Mr. Terrell is currently the vice mayor Tifton, Georgia.

Ann Rhea Walker was born in Americus, Georgia. After graduating from high school, she left Americus to attend Morris Brown College in Atlanta, Georgia. Mrs. Rhea Walker eventually returned to Sumter County where she taught in the public school system for decades. She was one of the first blacks in Americus elected to city council.

Ann Wheeler was born in Colquitt County and graduated from William Bryant High School. Ms. Wheeler took a number of years off from school but eventually received her license to sale insurance at the age of 38. She still resides in Colquitt County.

Dale Williams was born in Moultrie, Georgia. He is a graduate of William Bryant High School. He, like Mr. Holton, is credited for being very instrumental in the student movement. After he graduated, he left Moultrie to attend college. Currently, Mr. Williams is the director for Human Resources in Moultrie, Georgia.

Juanita Wilson was born in Americus, Georgia. She graduated from Sumter High School then spent two years at Spelman College but finished at Georgia Southwestern. Mrs. Wilson has spent her adulthood as an educator. She taught for over thirty years in the

Sumter County Public School System. Mrs. Wilson was also a council member for several years.

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