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White Southerners Respond to *Brown v. Board of Education*: Why Crisis Erupted
When Little Rock, Arkansas, Desegregated Central High School

An Honors Project for the Program of Africana Studies

By Abby Elizabeth Motycka

Bowdoin College, 2017

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to my late father, Gregory John Motycka.

I am lucky I inherited your incredible love of the past and passion for learning about the experiences of others. You continue to inspire me to appreciate history in the most meaningful way and without your passion, I would not have started or completed my honors thesis. Thank you and I love you.

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Preface

When I was 10, my fifth-grade class did a unit on the Little Rock Crisis of 1957. The unit was split into three parts. First, we read *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Patillo Beals, one of the Little Rock Nine, and discussed what the text meant to us, focusing primarily on understanding the definition of discrimination. Second, the school brought in Minnijean Brown, another member of the Little Rock Nine, to visit and answer questions that arose in our discussions. Lastly, the grade drove from Nashville, Tennessee to Little Rock, Arkansas and visited Central High School. The teachers handed us notebooks and we scattered around the front of the school to journal and record our impressions. Reflecting back, this unit was extremely comprehensive and an introduction to southern history, specifically civil rights. I began grappling with how to define the South.

I was born and raised five minutes from downtown Nashville. My upbringing exposed me to a hybrid of cultures, raised by two New Englanders in a southern, white neighborhood. My house is not too far from the Belle Meade Plantation and within driving distance of Andrew Jackson's Hermitage property. I attended a racially diverse private school across the street from Vanderbilt University and only some of my classmates talked with southern accents.

After settling into Bowdoin on move-in day, my roommate asked me, "why don't you have an accent?" To which I replied, "I don't know, I just don't." She said she was disappointed, she had never met someone with a southern accent before. This wasn't the first time someone asked me why I didn't have an accent and it always led me to debate whether I was a "true southerner." What did it mean to be southern and did I not fit? Now that I left my home state, it became obvious rather quickly that my Bowdoin peers possessed a very clear

image of how a southerner should be. This image was not completely foreign to me, but I wasn't it. Since this first encounter, and the countless that followed, I wonder where I fit on the spectrum. I dug deeper into what my southern identity meant to me and reflected back on my education at the University School of Nashville.

My interest in the Little Rock Crisis resurfaced at Bowdoin and evolved into this project. Little Rock allows me to study the South, a region I feel connected to, and learn about Little Rock, another southern capitol, during a reflective moment in history. The southern identity people in Little Rock protected after *Brown v. Board of Education* is rooted in a "southern way of life." The South and the North are connected to two separate histories. They possess two separate identities and a variety of different stereotypes. This project explores the implications of these stereotypes to uncover why the South understands their region to be representative of a different identity. The *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision draws out ideologies through regional reactions.

When I thought about doing an honors project for the Africana Studies department, I decided to research a topic that would help me understand the history of the region I grew up in and feel passionate about. At Bowdoin, the classes I took in the Africana Studies department taught me how to think critically about African American history. I learned to ask questions of myself, professors, and peers. My approach to these courses always ends up bringing me back to my perspective as a white southerner. I wanted to know why white segregationists reacted the way they did and was inspired to reevaluate my home city using this critical lens. For these reasons, I will focus on the Southern spectrum of reactions, specifically the pro-segregationist perspective.

My thesis discusses African American history in the South by studying the “southern way of life.” Learning about the history of white people in the South is an essential part of understanding African American history. The white southern identity that reacted to *Brown* and the threat of racial integration of public schools was not the only white reaction, but it is a significant reaction in history that is linked and represented by this way of life. The white southern identity, one that I associate with, is complex and historical. This project seeks to understand the complexities and influence of this identity. I hope I can uncover why white southern pro-segregationists responded to *Brown* with violence, resistance, and mobilization.

Acknowledgments

A big thank you to my advisor, Brian Purnell, who oversaw this year-long project and pushed me to be my very best self. What I thought I could achieve was nothing compared to what you helped me discover I could accomplish by the end. I am truly appreciative for your invaluable guidance during this unconventional journey. To my secondary reader, Meredith McCarroll, thank you for your ongoing suggestions and support. Bowdoin challenged me to think for myself and unapologetically share my opinions. I hope this project is reflective of the exciting, thoughtful, and inspiring education Bowdoin gave me over the past four years.

Many people over the last seven months offered me such amazing support. Thank you to my mom, Mary Atkins, and my brother, Eli Motycka, for listening to me on the phone and encouraging me to keep writing even though I wouldn't let you read any of my work. You can read it now! To my grandparents, thank you for telling me stories and politely answering all my questions about what it was like living through the 1950s. And thank you to my grandmother, Stephanie Murray, for valuing my education and helping make my dream of attending Bowdoin come true.

Thank you to Liza Tarbell, Lily Woodward, Sophie Binenfeld, and Christian Zavardino for the memories on the second floor of Hawthorne-Longfellow library. And thank you to my supportive friends that did not live on the second floor – but who visited – Bridget Went, Rebecca Fisher, Katie Kronick, Chloe Polikoff, Natasha Belsky and Emma Roberts. You listened to my endless complaining, crying, and laughing. You all held me up. Overall, this year brought out the highest of highs and the lowest of lows and ultimately taught me to ask questions of myself and demand answers from history. Last but not least, thank you to carrel 237. You were a wonderful home!

Introduction

What was the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* on the United States and how did pro-segregationists in the South respond? In order to answer this question, I argue three key arguments over the course of three chronological chapters. In chapter one, I argue that segregationists from southern states responded to *Brown* by fighting to preserve segregation in order to protect a racial hierarchy they believed was essential. This racial hierarchy is magnified in the southern capital of Little Rock, Arkansas, which I argue in chapter two exposed segregationists' political defiance and poor organization around racial integration of public schools. After a year of integration, analyzed in chapter three, I conclude my chapters by arguing the first year slowed down the segregationist organizations, but did not persuade them that racial integration would improve the "southern way of life."

This phrase, a central point in my analysis and foundational concept to my question, describes the mentality of pro-segregationists in the South during desegregation. Supporting questions include, what is this racial hierarchy and why is it so engrained in the southern way of life? What is it specifically about *Brown* that sparks such a violent and passionate response from a subset of white southerners? Is the Southern reaction truly different than the Northern reaction? When was the turning point for Little Rock that determined the fate of Central High School's success? Who allowed integration to gain national attention in Little Rock? And finally, why does this matter as a significant moment in history?

To address these questions, I discuss four themes. These themes include the public-school system, desegregation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, political and social leadership, and organizations of resistance. The white pro-segregationists I focus on took advantage of the poor and disorganized political leadership in Little Rock to create a moment of chaos

around Central High School's integration plan. Communication and support between the School Board, directed by Superintendent Virgil Blossom, and the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, essentially fell apart. As organizations protested and fought against *Brown* a "southern way of life" emerged.

"A southern way of life," is often the explanation southern segregationists provided when they wanted to draw a distinction between the North and the South, oppose political change, distract from unethical and illegal activities, and disguise exploitation and racist behavior. Southern states fought against integration in order to protect this culture. Any change was sure to disrupt the status quo, but the South definitely stood out among the rest of the nation in attempts to halt any further "meddling" by the federal government. School desegregation challenged the South to identify why public schools needed to be segregated and stay segregated. This debate juxtaposed states against one another to show how different areas of the country reacted to *Brown*. In comparison, Southern states reacted differently than northern states, existing in different racialized environments, and narrowing in on Little Rock creates a lens in which to analyze this collective segregationist response.

The "southern way of life" is a problem. It is a constructed belief carefully fabricated to feed into a complimentary constructed culture. Projecting issues of race, citizenship, and a racial hierarchy onto the "southern way of life" becomes acceptable in times of distress because it is difficult to accurately define. This phrase masks the deeper feeling and relations between whites and blacks in the South who are given a different experience of citizenship in order to maintain a hierarchy. Schools become the marketplace for addressing how to preserve this life because children will be responsible for its preservation. Those who use this term to describe why they oppose *Brown* are supporting the inequality among races through

political and social discrimination. *Brown* effectively asked pro-segregationists what the “southern way of life” means to them and what was at stake if it changed. The “southern way of life” perpetuates this difference seen during the Civil War, Black Codes and legislation, and now during desegregation. *Brown* reignites southern angst because segregation is a system that the South relies on to preserve its social hierarchy.

This way of life becomes a myth of nostalgia and purity. African Americans integrating white schools is an infiltration of the pure, white system of education. As a result, white segregationists call on this myth to consolidate power and communicate to the nation ideologies of the past. It generates a threat. Is this threat real? The pro-segregationist would argue it is incredibly dangerous to the entire nation, especially the South, and encroaches on the perfectly satisfactory life they lived before *Brown*. The legal possibility that black people could receive an equal education to whites suggested the “southern way of life” was weakening and myths, symbols, legends, ritual, religiosity, and power structures needs to be reinforced. In particular, the myth is made up of whatever the individual wants to project onto it, which contributes to the danger of the “southern way of life.” It is impossible for there to be one way of life in the South, meaning this myth is exclusionary and serves only part of the population. What about a black southern way of life? The original phrase does not include racialized language, but instead only a “southern way of life.” This silences black southerners that hold a powerful and significant history in the South. Life in the South is diverse. However, the white segregationist voice and many other white voices rise above the rest by way of economic, social, and political discrimination that leads to a disillusionment of the “southern way of life.”

Southerners are more inclined to declare themselves a citizen of their home state instead of a citizen of a republic.¹ Therefore, to be a Mississippian, a Tennessean, or a Georgian trumped a national American identity. Hannah Arendt claims southern populations are homogeneous and deeply rooted in the past. Arendt describes the southern perspective in relation to the North by describing each region by defining their unique commitment to the law and treatment of African Americans. Arendt believed the South presented a conflict for the nation given the South's historical understanding of state's rights. In the South, this structure was embedded in the southern identity, which was dependent on a feeling of economical, educational, and political superiority. For segregationists, blacks existed as an inferior race in order to preserve a dynamic established before the Civil War. White southern segregationists could not imagine living in a society without this dynamic. They felt accustomed and entitled to it. Entitlement is demonstrated through a system that has consistently served the interests of the white population up until this moment in time. The normalcy created a false sense of security that white segregationists witnessed be dismantled by *Brown*.

During Reconstruction, African Americans in the South directed their newfound political power towards building, funding, and staffing black schools.² After gaining their freedom, freedmen wanted to establish schools in order to build a strong, educated citizenry. Asking for public education for free blacks added to white supremacists' urge to overthrow Reconstruction governments, significantly stalling black advancement in order to maintain their own political power. Without the support of local governments, black educational

¹ Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," in *Dissent* (1959): 45-56. Here 47.

² David Tyack and Robert Lowe, "The Constitutional Moment: Reconstruction and Black Education in the South," *American Journal of Education* 94, no. 2 (1986): 236-56. Here 236.

opportunities diminished, and civil rights suffered.³ In order to create a foundation for African American education, blacks “banded together to provide education from their meager private resources.”⁴ They made public education a civil right. W.E. B. Du Bois references the eagerness to learn among African Americans as exceptional because “the very feeling of inferiority which slavery forced upon them fathered an intense desire to rise out of their condition by means of education.”⁵ Education remained at the top of the Republican agenda during Reconstruction. Historians David Tyack and Robert Lowe refer to this period of Reconstruction in the 1860s and 1870s as a “brief period of hope,” stating, “black public education in the South contradicted the fundamental principles that linked schooling to the republican form of government.”⁶ Blacks gained republican citizenship, but many southerners understood a black education to be an entirely different debate.

Segregation of the races existed before the Civil War and carried on through Reconstruction with the Black Codes. These postwar enacted laws did not survive the time period, but are replaced by an “informal code of exclusion and discrimination.”⁷ Leon F. Litwack, a historian of the Reconstruction era, believed no efforts were made by the blacks to integrate because it was impossible to enforce integration laws on “unwilling and resisting whites.”⁸ The task at hand was to reproduce a system equal to white public education before securing further accommodations. Separation of the races in “custom, habit, and etiquette,” defined society. Litwack references “uppity” blacks who pushed past the established

³ Tyack and Lowe, "The Constitutional Moment," 236.

⁴ Tyack and Lowe, "The Constitutional Moment," 238.

⁵ W.E.B Du Bois and David Levering Lewis, *Black Revolutions in America: 1860-1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1935) Print, 638.

⁶ Tyack and Lowe, "The Constitutional Moment," 240.

⁷ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998) Print, 229.

⁸ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 230.

customs, habits, and etiquettes of the races perceived as extremely dangerous and threatening.⁹ This method suggests gradual change.

The beginning of African American education, post-Civil War, started with small schoolhouses. One of the first schools was set up in Savannah, Georgia in January of 1865.¹⁰ The school was established in the Bryant Slave Mart and by December, “the colored people of Savannah had opened a number of school with five hundred pupils, and they were contributing a fund of a thousand dollars for the support of the teachers.”¹¹ Black leaders in the community collected money from ex-slaves and hired teachers to begin establishing a local school system. After the Civil War, classrooms in North Carolina took place in local black churches.¹² The beginnings of black schools, in a variety of different environments, communicated to children the importance of an education, regardless of location. In order to build a foundation for African American education, Americans faced many obstacles and adjustments. These actions led the way for changes to the educational system in the future and different reactions to surface in opposition.

This project chronologically presents an argument about the Southern segregationist response to *Brown v. Board of Education*. Beginning with the *Brown* decision, I will discuss the initial responses to such a historical decision and analyze the actions pro-segregationist groups took to protest *Brown*. Next, I explore the first year of integration at Central High School and finally move to a discussion on the post-integration period in Little Rock, Arkansas. I will argue that segregationists from southern states responded to *Brown* by

⁹ Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 230.

¹⁰ Du Bois and Lewis, *Black Revolutions in America*, 645.

¹¹ Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 240; Du Bois and Lewis, *Black Revolutions in America*, 645.

¹² Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 240.

fighting to preserve segregation in order to protect a racial hierarchy they believed was essential to a southern way of life. In the fall of 1957, the nation looked to Little Rock, Arkansas as a representative of the southern hostility brewing around integration. This research tries to explain and analyze the ways in which white segregationists fought for society to remain untouched by *Brown*.

Looking at the black community's influence on this society, blacks actually shape southern racial hierarchies as an outside group. White segregationists understand state resources, political, economic, and social, to exist for the needs of whites, not blacks. Despite the black community's deep roots in southern history, this historical relationship between the southern white community and southern black community remains divided. Whites can coexist with blacks if blacks work to preserve white superiority. If not, they recognize this pending threat. To white segregationists in the South, the most threatening repercussions of integration are race-mixing and the violation of God's word.

Primary sources and historiographical works speak to a hostile environment in the South through the late 1950s. As news of the integration of Little Rock spread, men and women around the nation, particularly from neighboring southern states, wrote or drove to Little Rock to contribute to the resistance. They wanted to explain the dangerous risks of race-mixing and religious betrayal in attempts to stop integration. They believed they could reverse the *Brown* decision. The fears and aggression of who comes out through violent mobs at Central, racist letters to the Little Rock School Board and Governor Faubus, white supremacist rhetoric, and a number of poorly planned political decisions. To the segregationist southerners, education was sacred to the American identity and need to be kept pure and white. By analyzing religion and motherhood as two main reasons to explain this

reaction, the “southern way of life” becomes better defined. The Bible is considered a reliable and factual text that many pro-segregationists refer to in my primary source research. Religion is purely interpretation and works to serve the segregationist agenda in any way the individual sees fit. In addition to this area of focus, mothers claim a major role in the resistance, some using biblical evidence, to preserve their children’s innocence. They have the time and the passion to keep their white race pure and prevent race-mixing in public schools. Religious southerners and mothers in Little Rock lend themselves to the cause of resistance in order to prevent any further corruption to their system of education.

Education took on a new meaning after *Brown*. This court case overturned the separate-but-equal doctrine established by *Plessy v. Ferguson* and redefined the United States education system. Providing equal access to public schools to both black and white children would lead to race-mixing and integration of not only schools, but also cultures, on an intimate level. Southern segregationists believed sharing a classroom was a gateway to dismantling the southern racial hierarchy and redefining the southern way of life against their will.

My project will work through the *Brown* decision in chapter one, integration in chapter two, and the aftermath of Little Rock’s first integrated school year in chapter three in order to analyze the southern segregationist reaction. Beginning with *Brown*, I will discuss the impact of adjusting the American system of education in such a significant way that it elicited an equally powerful response from the nation. Turning specifically to the South recognizes the logic of their reactions and the reasoning behind their argument for segregation on the right. On the spectrum of Southern reactions, the segregationist reaction appeared louder and more aggressive compared to Southern moderates and ant-racists.

Understanding the Supreme Court Justices and the five cases presented with *Brown* offers an analysis of how the nation understood race. It is important to keep in mind the generalizations made about the South, but I believe the journey of desegregation does point to the South's reaction as more violent, angry, and upset compared to other regions. This moment in history attacks the roots of southern ideologies linked to state's rights dating back to southern secession.

The racial hierarchy set up by political policy and social behaviors defined this difference between the North and the South. From *Plessy* until *Brown*, this hierarchy persevered because the South could protect their interests with the "separate-but-equal" doctrine under the Constitution. In 1954, the foundational principle of separation was undermined by the Supreme Court and therefore legally invalidated the "southern way of life." Citizenship, political power, and economic control existed under this hierarchy, which was maintained by southern politicians and white southerners who supported the separation. Their commitment to segregation are tested in 1954, where my project begins.

Chapter one takes my project from the macro to the micro. After the *Brown* decision, the nation responds. Starting in Maryland, white mobilization against the decision begins to make a pathway for more resistance further south. White pro-segregationists form organizations and host rallies to protest against integration and radical groups emerge in the Deep South. At the end of chapter one, I introduce Arkansas through a top-down perspective. Governor Orval Faubus and Superintendent Virgil Blossom act as the authority figures in the state, in which the nation communicates with. They set the stage for the political atmosphere in Little Rock and the racial tension. Little Rock quickly becomes the voice for other southern cities and many segregationists invest themselves in the success of preventing the

integration of Central High School. The South recognizes the beginning of the 1957 fall semester at Central will effectively set the tone of integrating the South.

In chapter two, I argue that Little Rock, Arkansas exposed the South's dependency on segregation through political defiance and poor organization. Faubus' calling of the Arkansas National Guard and Blossom's gradual plan tried to make integration easier on the white segregationists encouraging their resistance. Even if Blossom originally wanted to support safe integration, he did not successfully work to achieve it. I will discuss the actions white segregationist organizations took to prevent integration and the network of mobilization across the South. White people organized, attacked, and aided one another in a collective, southern effort to stop the Little Rock Nine. Mothers hosted protests during the school days and their children launched campaigns of violence within the school's halls. Central became a battle ground for white supremacists demoralizing nine black students. On the macro level, this treatment established a visual understanding of the South's reaction to *Brown*. The rest of the country became witnesses to the violence and extreme propaganda produces by the far right of the spectrum.

The final chapter of this project goes further into the significance of segregation in the South by analyzing primary source information as well as how Central survived one year of integration. I argue that the first year of integration slowed down the segregationist organizations, but did not persuade them that integration would improve the southern way of life. Politicians and the Arkansas General Assembly were ready for the spring term to end. They planned to regroup and redeem themselves over the summer. Primary source analysis speaks to the high volume of citizens writing into Little Rock and their commitment to picking the fight up where they left off.

I want to focus on the decisions segregationists made, both civilians and politicians with political power, to fight against such a significant change in southern society. Scholars of the Civil Rights Movement tend to focus on African American efforts to gain equal rights and shy away from segregationist efforts. George Lewis's book on massive resistance during the Civil Rights Movement directly engages with the politics of resistance presented by segregationists. In his opening chapter, Lewis quotes the most senior southern politician in 1956, Senator Harry Flood Byrd from Virginia, as stating, "If we can organize the Southern States for massive resistance to this order...I think that in time the rest of the county will realize that racial integration is not going to be accepted in the South."¹³ Lewis' strategic quoting and argument that politicians held influence over their constituents engages with my argument that southerners responded to Governor Faubus' actions directly. Primary sources confirm the criticism Faubus received from his fellow southern political peers, proving this influence across the South.

A chronological argument of what caused the South's response to *Brown*, what the response was, and what happened after the initial reactions creates a narrative that is representative of this southern way of life for segregationists. Through white segregationist organization, the nation witnessed the hostility white southerners felt towards integration and the Supreme Court. Their comfortable, established racial hierarchy appeared compromised, "the questions of what structure of social ordering would replace the familiar hierarchies of both North and South made this a period of volatility and uncertainty."¹⁴ The white South's reaction included a resurfacing of state's rights arguments and ideologies of racial inferiority.

¹³ George Lewis, *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2006), Print. 2.

¹⁴ Grace Elizabeth Hale, 1999, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, (New York: Vintage Books), 6.

However, rather than on battlefield, after *Brown*, expressions of southern mentality manifested in front of high schools.

In 1896, with the passing of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, many white people felt comfortable with the advantages of whiteness in a highly racialized society and supported the “separate-but-equal” doctrine. Roughly sixty years later, in 1957, the nation looked to Little Rock, Arkansas to see if how a southern state would respond to *Brown*. The Little Rock School Board, governor, and community were at odds, presenting to the nation a disorganized and chaotic response. They provided a visible understanding of the racial hierarchy in which the region existed. The South’s reaction to integration communicated to the rest of the nation how deeply attached southerners felt about racially segregated societies. White superiority and public influence was at stake. This meant they could no longer call on the law to support their racial hierarchy.

Chapter 1

The Historical Journey to Brown v. Board of Education and How the South Chose to React

Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, African Americans living in the South accepted the state of Negro education because to oppose it meant risking the delicate relationship with dominant whites.¹⁵ Leading spokesmen in African American communities did not feel the moment was right to do more than simply establish quasi-schoolhouses. They needed to lay the foundation before moving forward. W.E.B. Du Bois captures the passion of African Americans in the late nineteenth century, stating, “the first great mass movement for public education at the expense of the state, in the South, came from Negroes.”¹⁶ This was a moment of change.

Blacks received an education, but did not receive an equal education based on resources and allocated state funds. Statistically, rural areas represented two-thirds of blacks in the public-school system and the per-pupil value of resources for blacks was less than one-fifth of whites.¹⁷ Harry Ashmore, a journalist in the twentieth century, explained, “Thus most Negro children received the same *kind* of education as the whites, inferior as it may have been in quantity and quality.”¹⁸ The South did not neglect blacks in schools, but they did create a significantly disadvantaged experience of education. By withholding financial support within an already weak southern school system, blacks struggled to maintain schools

¹⁵ Harry Ashmore, *The Negro and The Schools*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 22.

¹⁶ Tyack and Lowe, “The Constitutional Moment,” 238.

¹⁷ Ashmore, *The Negro and The Schools*, 17.

¹⁸ Ashmore, *The Negro and The Schools*, 19.

across the South. A system of education, for Du Bois, meant preventing a digression back to slavery.¹⁹ He believed that with a framework for African American education, including public schools and the Negro churches, “the Negro had acquired enough leadership and knowledge to thwart the worst designs of the new slave drivers.”²⁰ Public education was the ticket to solidifying citizenship.

The United States system of education exists as a historically segregated institution built to educate young white children. After the Civil War, black men and women worked to open schoolhouses for the first generation of free children to learn how to read and write. These late nineteenth century schoolhouses represented the beginning of a segregated school system. White children went to their white schools, and black children went to their black schools. After Reconstruction, southern society understood segregation as natural. Years passed and the system did not change. In the mid twentieth century, two separate educations existed and white society acknowledged their educational superiority, but refused to adjust the system.

From 1940 through the 1950s, the southern states spent considerably more state collected funds to sustain white schools, colleges, and universities demonstrating their lack of support for black students. Research compiled by the SSCPEA from reports of the state departments of educations shows that in 1940, Arkansas spent \$30.10 per white student compared to \$13.01 on black students. This shifted in 1950 to \$102.05 and \$67.75 respectively.²¹ Analyzing this data exposes the gap between white and black education in Arkansas. Scholar Richard Kluger explains, “the South was spending twice as much to

¹⁹ Du Bois and Lewis, *Black Revolutions in America*, 667.

²⁰ Du Bois and Lewis, *Black Revolutions in America*, 667.

²¹ Ashmore, *The Negro and The Schools*, 153.

educate each white child as it was per black child. It was investing four times as much in white school plants, paying white teachers' salaries 30 percent higher, and virtually ignoring the critical logistics of transporting rural Negroes to their schoolhouses," perpetuating this inherently unequal system.²² Blacks and whites existed in two separate educational spheres and did so for almost a century. Based on their research, Ashmore and Kluger agree black schools, though existent, did not appear to receive the same amount of attention as whites. It was not until the mid-twentieth century that legal cases debating this issue resulted in a few small victories.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate the journey from *Plessy v. Ferguson* to *Brown v. Board of Education* and provide an analysis of southern reactions to the Supreme Court's decision, which challenged southern culture and identity. Analyzing smaller cases leading up to *Brown*, and the individual attitudes of the Supreme Court justices who made this monumental decision, I argue that *Brown v. Board of Education* sparked a critical reaction from a subset of society, white segregationists, who chose to fight for their dependency and comfort in a segregated society. White organizations, such as the White Citizen's Council and the Mother's League of Central High School, reacted by organizing town meetings and protesting outside Central. They feared the possibility of their white children becoming intimate or friendly with black children, known as "race-mixing." Segregationists insisted that racial discrimination was "at its core, sexual, psychological, and emotional rather than economic or political."²³ If schools integrated, the racially mixed

²² Richard Klugar, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1975) Print, 255.

²³ Jason Sokol, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 91, no. 1 (2007): 106-08. Here 199.

environment would inevitably lead to a new, different, and threatening racially diverse community.

Section One: Plessy v. Ferguson and Early Cases of Segregation

In 1890, the state of Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act to legally segregate railway cars and prevent race-mixing from occurring on trains. This legislation was for the purpose of preventing race-mixing. The state wanted to protect the white race from mixing with who they saw as an inferior people. After the Civil War, whites found themselves in a position to rationalize equal rights between whites and blacks after the Emancipation Proclamation emerging into a new, racialized society.²⁴ Citizens of Louisiana organized the Comité des Citoyens to repeal the act and its violation against the Fourteenth amendment, which secured equal protection against discriminatory state legislation for all United States citizens. Homer Plessy volunteered to test the Separate Car Act.

Plessy was an octoroon, meaning he was of Negro decent with “negro blood”, but could pass as a white man. He later attempted to take a train from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana in a white railway car. The Louisiana police arrested Plessy for sitting in the wrong car and removed him from the train. The railway company did not give any justification for identifying Plessy as a Negro man. His case became known as the *Homer Adolph Plessy v. The State of Louisiana*. Judge John Howard Ferguson ruled in favor of the state of Louisiana and declared the Separate Car Act constitutional, citing Louisiana’s legal right to regulate private railroad companies inside state borders.

The Comité des Citoyens and attorney Albion Tourgee took Plessy’s case to the United State Supreme Court in 1896 and argued the Separate Car Act deprived African

²⁴ Richard A. Maidment, “Plessy v. Ferguson Re-Examined,” *Journal of American Studies* 7 (1973): 125-132. Here 125-126.

Americans of their rights. Once again, Tourgee lost in a seven-to-one defeat. The “separate but equal” doctrine which resulted from *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, helped whites legally reinforce a racial hierarchy after the Thirteenth and Fourteenth amendments. Segregation separated races and paved the way for new laws to reestablish a legal, white hierarchical system. Separate water fountains, seats on the bus, lunch counters, restrooms, classrooms, and parts of the sidewalk separated whites and blacks in public life. This system survived fifty-eight years before *Plessy* was overturned by *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Between 1896 and 1954, numerous cases surfaced regarding the unconstitutionality of separate but equal.

Thurgood Marshall needed a strong legal defense and organized legal strategy to convince the Supreme Court to overturn *Plessy*. Marshall was a qualified lead attorney given his education and careful consideration of legal campaigns. If they did overturn *Plessy*, Marshall believed the country would work to accept the law because it was passed through the respected court system. The legal team focused exclusively on cases of segregation in order to build a collection of cases involving Fourteenth amendment violations. Marshall chose to narrow in on specific educational spaces, such as law schools and graduate programs, because judges could empathize with these institutions from personal experience.²⁵ Marshall and his team used the legal system to their advantage by focusing on specific cases to contribute to this approach. *Henderson v. United States* and *Sweatt v. Painter*, along with a couple others cases on education at the graduate level, built a strong portfolio for Marshall and his team. They could begin building their argument.

²⁵ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 15.

In 1950, Elmer Henderson, a young black man from Baltimore, Maryland, brought the Supreme Court's attention back to railroad segregation while travelling between Washington, D.C. and Birmingham Alabama. At the time, Henderson was a field representative for the wartime President's Committee on Fair Employment Practices.²⁶ After he was denied service, Henderson argued segregated facilities in southern dining cars violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth amendment. African Americans sat behind a curtain next to the kitchen, unseen by the entirely white dining space.²⁷ When white patrons needed the extra table, the railway removed the dividing curtain, and forced blacks to wait to eat after whites finished. The Supreme Court found this regulation discriminatory, and unanimously struck it down.²⁸ Victories such as Henderson's sparked hope for future victories. Henderson's case discusses the mistreatment he received as an American citizen. The Supreme Court agreed. After Henderson, Heman Sweatt felt discriminated against while applying to law schools and decided to bring forward his own case.

Heman Sweatt's case challenges systematic racism in the 1950s. Many students felt the inequalities in higher education through resources, access, and the qualifications of faculty and staff. Sweatt applied to attend law school in Texas at the University of Texas.²⁹ The university denied his enrollment solely on racial grounds. Sweatt quickly enlisted the help of Thurgood Marshall, a young lawyer working for the NAACP, to prepare his case for the Supreme Court. The state tried to convince the Court that access to state law library facilities and comparable floor space would produce a law degree equal to that of the white

²⁶ Claudia Levy, "Elmer Henderson, Lawyer Who Sued to Integrate Rail Cars," *SFGATE* (2001), <http://www.sfgate.com/news/article/Elmer-Henderson-lawyer-who-sued-to-integrate-2898718.php>.

²⁷ Find Law for Legal Professionals, *Henderson v. United States*, Cases and Codes, <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-supreme-court/339/816.html>.

²⁸ James T. Patterson, *Brown v. Board of Education: A Civil Rights Milestone and Its Troubled Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001) Print, 6.

²⁹ *Sweatt v. Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950).

students. However, Marshall argued the segregated schools did not create equal learning environments and therefore unequal degrees. For example, black students did not have distinguished alumni for advisement and could not contact white law professors.³⁰ In *Sweatt v. Painter*, the Court found black law school facilities in Texas to be inadequate and unequal compared to facilities at the white law school. This proved a second victory for integration. Sweatt's case contributed to Marshall's collection of cases to argue in front of the Supreme Court.

Henderson and Sweatt demonstrate two Supreme Court victories against discriminatory facilities and institutions. They point out specific instances when separate but equal failed to protect African Americans. Henderson and Sweatt both filed in 1950, establishing a foundation and momentum towards overturning *Plessy*. These cases were only two of what could have been many cases filed against *Plessy*. It was becoming apparent to the Supreme Court that facilities and institutions did not necessarily provide an equal opportunity to African Americans as whites. Education, a foundational pillar of American society, should be accessible to African American as citizens and if they did not receive this opportunity than America could not claim to be a fair, equal society.

Section Two: The Supreme Court and *Brown v. Board of Education*

In October of 1953, the Supreme Court transitioned leadership from Chief Justice Vinson to Chief Justice Warren.³¹ Historians Mark Tushnet and Katya Lezin characterize Vinson leadership as lacking any influence, receiving little support from his fellow Justices. Tushnet and Lezin stated that the rest of the Court "respected neither his intellect nor his

³⁰ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 18.

³¹ Robert L. Carter, "The Warren Court and Desegregation," *Michigan Law Review* 67, no. 2 (1968): 237-48. Here 237.

leadership skills,” and voiced these concerns.³² Once the *Brown v. Board of Education* case reached the Court in December of 1952, the Court appeared scattered and divided on how to handle the case.³³ It would take a strong hand, and liberal mind to convince the Court to adjust their approach and Chief Justice Warren’s appointment brought about this opportunity for the nation.

Under Chief Justice Vinson, the Court was divided. If the Court was going to overturn a decision with the magnitude that *Plessy* carried, a unanimous opinion was vital.³⁴ Warren’s forceful leadership style brought the Court together. Justice Frankfurter wrote to Justice Reed, stating, “I have no doubt that if the *Segregation* cases had reached decision last Term there would have been four dissenters – Vinson, Reed, Jackson and Clark – and certainly several opinions for the majority view. That would have been catastrophic.”³⁵ One reason to dissent the decision is present by Reed. He communicated his concern over desegregation by dedicating himself to the South’s ability to upgrade black schools and work harder on enforcing “the equal part of separate-but-equal.”³⁶ This reason among others leads Tushnet and Lexin to suggest under Vinson’s leadership the Court would have voted to uphold segregation because Vinson himself often voted this way, though they have no conclusive evidence. However, Justice Frankfurter blamed Vinson for the Court’s poor approach to segregationist cases.³⁷ With new leadership and Chief Justice Warren’s appointment, this approach changed. Warren’s appointment arrived at a moment when the

³² Mark Tushnet and Katya Lezin, "What Really Happened in *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Columbia Law Review* 91, no. 8 (1991): 1867-930. Here 1871.

³³ Tushnet and Lexin, "What Really Happened in *Brown v. Board of Education*," 1871.

³⁴ Tushnet and Lexin, "What Really Happened in *Brown v. Board of Education*," 1872.

³⁵ Tushnet and Lexin, "What Really Happened in *Brown v. Board of Education*," 1871.

³⁶ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 55.

³⁷ Tushnet and Lexin, "What Really Happened in *Brown v. Board of Education*," 1872.

concept of 'separate but equal' appeared weak.³⁸ Thurgood Marshall's cases, brought forth by the NAACP legal team, would challenge the Justices to think about how their actions would affect the South.

Appointed by Eisenhower in March of 1954, Justice Warren brought a sense of fairness and liberality to the Court, which would impact the approach the Court took to cases related to race discrimination. Warren strongly believed in overturning cases if the needs of the people changed over the course of a century.³⁹ Warren's eagerness to establish civil relationships with his fellow justices showed his determination to build a united judicial front. With only a few years of experience on the Court, he began preparing for his first major case: *Oliver Brown et al. v. Board of Education of Topeka*. This decision tested the Court's ability to work together on cases involving racial issues. Some Justices wanted to maintain separate but equal and work on tightening legislature about upgrading African American schools. Others wanted to race discrimination cases head-on and decide whether or not the Constitution fairly protected all American citizens.

The Supreme Court feared what a decision of this magnitude would do to the standing of the Court, and the nation as a whole. By declaring "separate but equal" unconstitutional, the Court was recasting America's understanding of race relations, "Blacks were no longer supplicants seeking, pleading, begging to be treated as full-fledged members of the human race; no longer were they appealing to morality, to conscience, to white America's better instincts."⁴⁰ This decision would set the tone of the Warren Court's approach to cases involving race relations in America. The Court predicted the country would react to the

³⁸ Carter, "The Warren Court and Desegregation," 237.

³⁹ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 60.

⁴⁰ Carter, "The Warren Court and Desegregation," 246.

social and political implications of this decision.⁴¹ For example, overturning *Plessy* acknowledged the lack of equality in American society and gave African Americans validation. This validation angered white segregationists for betraying the racial hierarchy as well as for siding with an inferior race. The Justices expressed concern over potential southern violence as a plausible reaction.

Before handing down their decision, the Supreme Court considered a number of initial questions pertaining to the South. They worried about the South's reaction to desegregation and if overturning *Plessy* would appear too radical for many white southerners. If they did overturn, the South was sure to respond with immediate anger and distress. In the past, if African Americans attempted to push the barriers of this racial hierarchy, some white southerners would respond violently. One example of this response is seen in 1865 with the forming of the Klu Klux Klan.

The KKK spearheaded the violent mob mentality in the South by instilling fear in the black population. One way to provoke fear was through lynching. Statistically, about 3,500 lynchings took place between 1865 and 1920.⁴² Historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage commented on the magnitude of southern lynching believing that this epidemic was so pervasive that the act defined "southern distinctiveness every bit as much as the Mason-Dixon line marked the boundary of the region."⁴³ Brundage's observation supports a particular understanding of the South. He suggests the South possesses a violent past associated with race relations that cannot be ignored. The KKK in part is able to create a narrative that is projected to the rest of the nation. In the time between Reconstruction and the 1950s, many southerners glorified the

⁴¹ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 55.

⁴² Randall M. Miller, "LYNCHING IN AMERICA: SOME CONTEXT AND A FEW COMMENTS," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 72, no. 3 (2005): 275-91. Here 275.

⁴³ Miller, "LYNCHING IN AMERICA," 277.

KKK's ability to "cleanse" the South of black bestiality.⁴⁴ Given the KKK's past reactions to African Americans, the Supreme Court kept these considerations in mind before ruling on *Brown*. To reignite sentiments expressed around the KKK would potentially lead to a repeat of the past. They proceeded with caution.

Thurgood Marshall needed to prove America deprived African Americans of a fair education. He needed to explain to the Court the unconstitutionality of the separate-but-equal doctrine by providing the Court with multiple examples of discrimination inflicted by American institutions. *Belton v. Gebhart*, *Bolling v. Sharp*, *Briggs v. Elliot*, *Davis v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, and most notably *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* made up the five cases Marshall filed to be heard in front of the Supreme Court.⁴⁵

Beginning with *Belton v. Gebhart*, the following summaries of each case presented with *Brown* are meant to emphasize the efforts blacks across the country made to fight back against *Plessy*. *Belton v. Gebhart* represented two separate claims filed in the state of Delaware. Both claims dealt with the same central issue that black families felt frustrated with the poorly maintained African American schools in Delaware.⁴⁶ In 1947, Gardner Bishop and the Consolidated Parts Group, Inc worked tirelessly to integrate eleven black high school students into the District of Columbia John Philip Sousa Junior High School.⁴⁷ After the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of segregated schools in Dc, the U.S. District court dismissed this case. However, when the Supreme Court was considering cases on segregation in 1951, they decided to include *Bolling v. Sharpe*. The third case in question took place in

⁴⁴ Miller, "LYNCHING IN AMERICA," 286.

⁴⁵ Brown Foundation For Educational Equity, Excellence, and Research, "Combined Brown Cases, 1951-1954," Mission, Kansas, <http://brownvboard.org/content/combined-brown-cases-1951-54>.

⁴⁶ *Belton v. Hebhart*, 91 A.2d 137 (1952).

⁴⁷ *Bolling v. Sharpe*, 347 U.S. 497 (1954).

South Carolina. Twenty parents filed a suit against the state asking for school buses to give black students the same consideration as whites. However, the state ignored their claims and the parents in turn filed a suit against segregation itself.⁴⁸ The final case filed with *Brown* was *Davis v. Country School Board*. Filed in 1951, this case involved a Farmville, Virginia high school student protesting Moton High School conditions. Barbara Rose Johns felt her education was severely affected by her school's lack of resources and held a two-week protest.

Marshall built his argument by using these five cases to prove the debilitating conditions of black schools, the irrational distances black students traveled to get to poorly-maintained schools, and the discriminatory nature of *Plessy*. Marshall argued black children lost their motivation to learn after realizing the federal government supported segregated schools. It was difficult for black children to believe they were equal to white children based on the blatant difference between physical conditions of schools and the quality of their own educations.

Marshall recruited other lawyers, including Louis Redding, Jack Greenberg, and John Hope Franklin, to help strengthen the NAACP's argument before the Supreme Court. Redding attended Brown University and Harvard Law School, becoming the first black man to pass the Delaware state bar exam.⁴⁹ His colleague, Greenberg, was a young white attorney eager to contribute to desegregating the school system, and John Hope Franklin, a professor of law at Howard University and Harvard, left his job to join Marshall's team.⁵⁰ Marshall and his peers worked tirelessly to expose the shortcomings of black schools through new court

⁴⁸ *Briggs v. Elliott*, 342 U.S. 350 (1952).

⁴⁹ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 30.

⁵⁰ John Hope Franklin, "To and from *Brown v. Board of Education*," *Washington History* 16 (2004/2005): 11-13. Here 12.

cases displaying evidence of lack of resources, poorly constructed buildings, horrible access, and crowded classrooms.

The NAACP's argument focused on black children travelling unreasonable distances to get to their segregated schools. Marshall used Linda Brown, a young girl from Topeka, Kansas, to demonstrate this point. She left her home at 7:40am and walked across dangerous railroad switching yards and the busiest streets in her town in order to get to school at 9:00am.⁵¹ If not for segregation, Linda would attend the white school seven blocks from her home in a mixed residential neighborhood. The unnecessary sacrifices she made to get to her black elementary school were dangerous enough to put her life at risk. Using Linda as their leading example, Marshall and his team developed a case to target the effect segregation had on young children and their understanding of society.

If the Warren Court deemed segregation unconstitutional, they were essentially commenting on southern beliefs. These beliefs came directly from racial, economic, and political status. If the federal government undermined the southern white position, then the nation appeared divided and hypocritical. The Supreme Court justices recognized the weight of such a decision and understood their ruling would effectively disrupt southern society. Lynchings and other forms of violence took place in order to maintain a racial hierarchy. Ruling in favor of African Americans compromised the southern way of life and welcomed a violent reaction. Based on historical facts and the South's record of responding to racially motivated legislation, Warren and his colleagues could be seen as undermining the southern politicians and segregationists. The stakes for white segregationists to lose their political

⁵¹ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 32.

power was incredibly high. They would no longer be able to control the system with ease or count on *Plessy* to protect their interests.

If the Warren Court overturned *Plessy*, this trial would represent a turning point in American history. Every small victory that came before, such as the trials of Henderson and Sweatt, would be validated. There was truth to the Henderson's and Sweatt's argument that *Plessy* compromised their rights and *Brown* provided necessary change to the system. If the Court recognized truth in *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregationists envisioned a gateway of African American cases receiving validation as well. It would only be the beginning.

On May 17, 1954, Chief Justice Warren delivered the Court's unanimous ruling against *Plessy v. Ferguson* declaring the law discriminatory against African Americans. He kept his opinion very brief. The critical sentence arrived two-thirds of the way in to his opinion, stating, "Does segregation of children in public school solely on the basis of race... deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe it does."⁵² The Court recognized segregation could not and would not deliver equal education under the constitution of the United States. Warren cited earlier cases, including *Sweatt v. Painter*, explaining the unavoidable fact that education in the United States was a present, significant, and unmovable institution of the country, stating, "We must consider public education in the light of its full development and its present place in American life throughout the Nation."⁵³ Warren included the Fifth Amendment and the Fourteenth Amendment to justify this transition promoting equal opportunity for all, free of discriminatory segregationist ideologies. African Americans were rightful citizens of this

⁵² Klugar, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education*, 707.

⁵³ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 66.

country entitled to life, liberty, and property without obstacles. *Plessy* compromised these rights.

Warren reflected back on the *Plessy* majority opinion, written by Henry Billings Brown. Brown discussed the psychological effect of segregated systems of education, which Warren wanted to draw on in his own opinion. Warren determined Brown's position that the separate-but-equal doctrine created an inferiority complex only when blacks chose to project race onto the issue of separation. Warren believed this logic flawed and fundamentally wrong. In his own opinion, Warren said the evidence of psychological effect between 1896 and now changed. In a footnote, the Court cited psychologist Kenneth Clark and his scientific testing of "racial preference."⁵⁴ The country was in a different place in need of equal education through mixed classrooms, trains, buses, lunch counters, and everything in between.

By using a controlled, unbiased experiment, psychologists created a test to explain this physiological effect and learned understanding of a racial hierarchy or otherness. In her piece, "Black Children, White Preference: *Brown v. Board*, the Doll Tests, and the Politics of Self-Esteem," Gwen Bergner explains this psychological effect by analyzing the Doll tests. Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted tests on African American children's racial identification using brown and white dolls. By asking the children a series of questions, they could scientifically determine the child's racial awareness, meaning their understanding of their race, stating, "A majority of children identified a brown doll as looking like them, but chose a white doll to play with, as the nice one, and as the one with a nice color."⁵⁵ Bergner,

⁵⁴ Gwen Bergner, "Black Children, White Preference: *Brown v. Board*, the Doll Tests, and the Politics of Self-Esteem," *American Quarterly* 61 (2009): 299-332. Here 299.

⁵⁵ Bergner, "Black Children, White Preference," 299.

and the Clarks, suggest a significant connection between African American children's racial awareness and their low self-esteem. The Supreme Court agreed. Due to these scientific advancements, *Plessy v. Ferguson* appeared outdated. It was unconstitutional.

Section Three: Responses to *Brown*

Responses to *Brown* varied across the nation and a spectrum of reactions solidified. However, the South presented a particularly unique array of responses. To white segregationists, integration undermined their racial hierarchy, encouraged race mixing, and betrayed God's word. The majority of southern politicians and state officials supported the white segregationist resistance. They opposed the Supreme Court and provided political validation to the far right. This was not the only reaction to *Brown*; the South's responses to *Brown* existed on a spectrum. White segregationists existed far to one side, opposite to the anti-racists. Between these two extremes are Southern moderates.

The moderate position preferred to remain nonviolent in order to protect the southern economy. Historian Anders Walker suggests Southern moderates articulated a "'strategic constitutionalism' that avoided open defiance of federal authority and, therefore, through evasion, succeeded in preserving racial inequality where massive resistance had failed."⁵⁶ By focusing on economic discrimination instead of violence, Southern moderates preserved a part of the racial hierarchy partially unaffected by *Brown*. The approach posed an interesting question to the debate. Segregationists felt betrayed by southerners who did not choose to join them and anti-racists believed in integration as a fundamental, civil right. Both sides saw the middle to be unpatriotic and passive. However, Southern moderates did take a stand that surfaced in more subtle ways compared to the segregationist groups.

⁵⁶ Mark Golub, "Remembering Massive Resistance to School Desegregation," *Law and History Review* 31, no. 3 (2013): 491-530. Here 494.

On the spectrum of Southern reactions to *Brown*, the segregationist voice drowned out all other responses. It became amplified to the rest of the nation. Scholar Wilma Dykeman analyzes the pro-segregation argument by stating, “the violent reactions to integration in the South are only the present and outward rumblings of deep inner dislocations which have been accumulating in the South for a long time.”⁵⁷ In this quote, Dykeman explains the historical context of the pro-segregationist position. She claims a violent, Southern reaction is a logical response to *Brown*’s potential to uproot the southern way of life. Segregationists’ “defiant attitudes and violent acts” are not isolated events, but part of an ongoing narrative. This narrative includes living one way and thinking another. Dykeman’s theory defines this Southern dilemma as “physically and economically the South is committed to the present industrial world of change; mentally, socially, and in majority of cases politically, it is still in thrall to a past agricultural order resisting all change.”⁵⁸ White southerners who sided with the extremist, violent segregationist agenda believed in a need for this past order. Many southerners wanted to preserve ideologies of racial division and economic hierarchies the antebellum created. In the early 1950s, these sympathizers looked to the past and began planning a way to fight back against change. They wanted to resist.

Segregationists began organizing different ways to express their frustration with *Brown*. Southern politicians felt particularly attacked by *Brown* and expressed concern over the constitutionality of the Supreme Court decision. Dykeman states, “noisy politicians once again campaign with the old demagogic devices of race and fear,” to defend the southern way of life.⁵⁹ Senator James Eastland of Mississippi was among the first to express his opinions

⁵⁷ Wilma Dykeman, "What Is the Southern Way of Life?" *Southwest Review* 44, no. 2 (1959): 163-66. Here 163.

⁵⁸ Dykeman, "What Is the Southern Way of Life?" 163.

⁵⁹ Dykeman, "What Is the Southern Way of Life?" 163.

on *Brown*. He stated, “The Supreme Court of the United States in the false name of law and justice has perpetrated a monstrous crime,” to describe *Brown*.⁶⁰ Governor George Wallace of Alabama agreed. Wallace publically declared himself a committed segregationist, vowing “segregation forever,” in every speech. Wallace started the white backlash against the federal government and volunteered to be the voice of the silent majority.⁶¹ His support credited white segregationists and their message to prevent integration from spreading deeper into the South. Senator Richard B. Russell from Georgia and former secretary of state James F. Byrnes of South Carolina joined the White Citizen’s Council, a newly formed segregationist southern organization, and backed its actions to obstruct *Brown*.

In addition to Southern politicians, Judge Thomas Pickens Brady from Mississippi published detailed response to *Brown* in attempts to describe the weight of the Supreme Court’s mistake. He believed the justices “arrested and retarded the economic and political and, yes, the social status of the Negro in the South for at least one hundred years,” after deciding to end segregation.⁶² This paternalistic response offers one position of southern support, even compassion, for the African American community’s well-being. This defense is weak and poorly supported. It attempts to mask the white segregationist view by discussing African American inferiority as a preferred condition. Other whites decided to take to the streets instead of writing a response.

The White Citizen’s Council prompted southern Congressmen to write a Southern Manifesto where they pledged to “‘bring about the reversal’ of the *Brown* decision.”⁶³ This

⁶⁰ David R. Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture 1940 to the Present*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990) Print, 75.

⁶¹ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) Print, 86.

⁶² Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*,” 76.

⁶³ Brent J. Aucoin, “The Southern Manifesto and Southern Opposition to Desegregation,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 55 (1996): 173-193. Here 173.

document was a political statement on behalf of the South. One historian, Alexander M. Bickel, bravely referred to this manifesto as “a calculated declaration of political war against the Court’s decision.”⁶⁴ The Southern Manifesto separated the South from other regions in the United States after nineteen senators and seventy-seven congressmen pledged to endorse the document.⁶⁵ This document, endorsed solely by Southern politicians, is meant to represent the Southern states as a region unwilling to succumb to the federal government’s requests. The Southern Manifesto isolates the South because it formally separates Southern politicians and their constituents from the rest of the nation, based on the *Brown* decision.

Driver’s definition of the Manifesto uses two distinct elements of segregationist ideology. In his analysis of the text, he describes the men who wrote the Manifesto as “enshrouded in the mist of mythology,” suggesting the significance of the Manifesto is in how the nation viewed its message.⁶⁶ The primary element being the southern authors’ “segregationist fervor caused them to take leave of their senses and issue an enraged attack against *Brown* – a screed that sounded like nothing so much as a latter-day rebel yell.”⁶⁷ Driver’s explanation of this element evokes a certain Civil War era nostalgia. His secondary element explains the Manifesto’s presumed lack of intellectual sophistication.⁶⁸ Driver’s scholarship defines these elements in order to describe the legal impact of the document. The Manifesto used harsh language and vulgar examples to urge the Court to reconsider. The Manifesto desperately wanted to show the nation *Brown*’s violation of the Constitution and blatant disregard of the Tenth amendment. *Brown* attacked state’s rights. The Manifesto and

⁶⁴ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950’s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), Print, 116.

⁶⁵ Justin Driver, “Supremacies and the Southern Manifesto,” *Texas Law Review* 92 No. 1053 (2014): 1053-2014. Here 1054.

⁶⁶ Driver, “Supremacies and the Southern Manifesto,” 1061.

⁶⁷ Driver, “Supremacies and the Southern Manifesto,” 1061.

⁶⁸ Driver, “Supremacies and the Southern Manifesto,” 1062.

other acts of political action validated protesters with a solid foundation to the South's discontent with *Brown*. After this public declaration of resistance by Southern politicians, white segregationists officially emerged in Delaware.

White resistance in Milford, Delaware, a state bordering the South, organized in September of 1954.⁶⁹ With little warning to the city, Milford High School integrated public high schools. Rumors circulated about confrontations between black and white students that worried parents about the future of race-mixing. Milford became the first historical moment of white resistance to *Brown*. After hearing of the ruling, a man named Bryant Bowles founded the National Association for the Advancement of White People in Washington, DC. In addition to the WCC, the NAAWP marked yet another formal organization of white segregationists. Bowles wanted to spread his organization throughout the nation and decided Milford could provide an excellent start.

In Milford, white people witnessed Bowles fiery passion for white supremacy and many joined him at a rally of 2,000 protesters. Bowles' and his followers threatened whites who dared to challenge their boycott. Southern moderates Milford became the nation's first look at implementation and it proved two things, "first, that ardent segregationists, especially if aided by demagogic outsiders, could negate the decision; and second, that integrationists in contests ahead would need forceful white community leaders to guide the masses of white people who uneasily sat on the fence."⁷⁰ Milford was a lesson to the South that resistance was possible. If Delaware organized and forced the School Board to reconsider its support of *Brown*, then surely the South could rise up and defeat this "unjust" law. Delaware offered a successful example of white resistance, which would soon spread throughout the South.

⁶⁹ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 75.

⁷⁰ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 75.

After southern public schools began opening for the fall semester, boycotts broke out in the region. Segregationists looked to their councilmen and state level politicians to give some sort of segregationist direction on how to respond. If political authorities and school boards aligned themselves with the Supreme Court and made statements supporting the decision, protests would lose momentum and give up. State officials interfered in Baltimore, Maryland when resistance broke out and reaffirmed their support right away. Without immediate reinforcement, southerner segregationists seized the opportunity to challenge the nation and enlighten them on the evils of integration. Southern moderates and citizens who felt unaffected by the *Brown* decision, remained neutral after this initial moment of resistance.

The white resistance to integration grew rapidly and recognized the need to mobilize their growing support to fight *Brown* effectively and preserve the “southern way of life.” In Mississippi, the White Citizen’s Council formed as a resource and network for segregationists. The Council’s main goal was massive resistance against any changes to “the southern way of life,” in order to preserve the untainted, white southern culture.⁷¹

White organizations, such as the WCC, wanted to show allegiance to regional values and the history shared between southern states. *Brown* posed a similar question to the South as the Civil War. The Confederacy pushed the South to clearly differentiate itself from the North, creating a clear divide in values. In 1950, the segregationists in the South felt compelled to resume this argument and resist the Supreme Court’s decision to treat the nation equally. What did segregation truly mean to their racial identity in the South? Analyzing the ideologies many confederates fought for, such as the right to maintain the racial hierarchy

⁷¹ Dan Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 82.

perpetuated by slavery, resurface during *Brown*. Each time period depicts a moment in history when the South feels threatened by the federal government.

Vocal white southerners understood the South as fundamentally different from the North. Historian Mark Golub articulates this difference, citing another historian, Numan Bartley, Golub states,

“Not only is racism safely contained in the South, its exceptional character renders it irrational and ‘anachronistic’ – tied to ‘the past’ – and thoroughly ‘alien’ to properly American egalitarian ideas. For Bartley, the *real* America is implicitly Northern and fully committed to the ‘tendency toward acceptance of human equality’ that had ‘penetrated American thought deeply by the post-World War II era.’”⁷²

Golub and Bartley analyze the South compared to the North in order to explain essential differences scholars must recognize when discussing the two regions. The North is different from the South and sees itself as such. Segregation was a delicate matter and the South needed an appropriate set of rules and treatment. Southerners believed the North possessed a far less African American population and therefore they could not honestly comment on southern desegregation. This theory is rooted in the South’s thriving slave society before the Civil War. The agricultural economy, sustained by slave labor, left a large population of free blacks in the South. By controlling the black population with slavery and then segregation, what would come next? *Brown* threw the South into disarray.

The South could not envision any step forward that involved integrated societies because they feared that African Americans would become comfortable as equals. Mixing the races would blur the clearly drawn line between whites and blacks. Segregationists could not imagine the atrocity that would be a racially mixed child who possessed civil rights. If a child was biracial and looked black, this child could theoretically exercise their American

⁷² Golub, "Remembering Massive Resistance to School Desegregation," 499.

rights while black. It would be the ultimate invasion of the racial hierarchy by blood. Biracial children, or mulattos, was not a new concept, but now these children were politically influential in ways they were not before. Once the Supreme Court erased this line, whites feared blacks would flood over to their safely superior side. The WCC continued to preserve and protect the racial hierarchy, but met further legislation from the Supreme Court.

In May 1955, the Supreme Court implemented *Brown II* and encouraged states to “integrate with all deliberate speed,” omitting any detailed explanation or official deadline to follow.⁷³ Chief Justice Warren intended for *Brown II* to give the states guidance towards giving *Brown* the attention it deserved, but did not push hard enough. The Court deferred southern and border state cases to federal judges in their respective districts and instructed these courts to “‘require that the defendants make a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance’ with *Brown*.”⁷⁴ The Court’s instructions are vague and lack a sense of urgency. The justices hoped for a better reaction from the South, but were naïve. The South chose to protect their southern way of life.

The Warren Court’s weak attempts with *Brown II* did not bring down the strong hand of the judicial system. The Supreme Court needed reinforcements from other areas of the federal and local governments. The South felt separated from the nation, and found comfort in segregationist organizations, such as the WCC and KKK, as an outlet. Southerners preferred gradualism or nothing at all. Gradualism acted as a form of resistance because it prolonged the process of integration. Southern politicians and school board superintendents saw gradualism as a compromise between the federal government and Southern

⁷³ Sondra Hercher Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year: What Happened When Little Rock Closed Its Public Schools* (Fayetteville: U of Arkansas, 2009), Print, 8.

⁷⁴ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 84.

segregationists. However, the nation looked on as years passed before any actual changes took effect in the southern public school system.

Gradualism gave segregationists time to process and evaluate *Brown*, “great social changes in history take place gradually: nothing that the Court could have done would quickly have reformed deeply established racial patterns in the South.”⁷⁵ This second wave of judicial action did reaffirm the Court’s position, but continued to stand alone. The South saw *Brown II* as a gift rather than a reminder. African Americans understood the realistic position of gradualism and tried to respect the Court’s predicament, but not for long.

Over the next two years, the nation slowly desegregated the public-school system, but only one gained national attention for blatant disrespect of the federal government. Arkansas, situated in the upper South, bordered Tennessee, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Missouri. In the past, Arkansas attracted minimal attention regarding race relations or political scandals. However, three years after the *Brown* decision, Little Rock, Arkansas made a name for itself across the nation as a southern city unable to peacefully integrate nine high schoolers into Central High School. White segregationists in Arkansas organized, but Little Rock was a relatively moderate southern capitol. For example, in 1955, Hoxie, Arkansas, northeast of the capitol, integrated. They met minor resistance, but did succeed in a timely fashion. *Life* Magazine wanted to capture the visual aspect of desegregation in the South and chose Hoxie. *Life* wrote, “It appeared that Hoxie would accept the change as readily as the other Arkansas towns that had already integrated.”⁷⁶ However, this would not be the case for every town in Arkansas.

⁷⁵ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 84.

⁷⁶ Reed, *Faubus*, 172.

Upon the arrival of the magazine's reporters to Hoxie, leading segregationist groups stationed in Hoxie led rallies and raised tensions between blacks and whites. Little Rock's leading segregationist lawyer, Amis Guthridge, travelled up to Hoxie to give speeches about the government's plans and encourage his followers to react violently if necessary. At a rally in Hoxie, Guthridge used "inflammatory racist remarks and images to rile up the crowd."⁷⁷ He publically condoned this behavior alongside other spokesmen, including James Johnson and Curt Copeland. Johnson was a well-connected white lawyer from the Arkansas-Louisiana border area. He occupied a Senate seat at the age of twenty-five as "the most effective wielder of the language that Arkansas had seen in many years," with an "astonishing gift for ribald imagery."⁷⁸ He worked closely with Copeland, the editor of Johnson's publication *Arkansas Faith*, who passionately believed in the White Citizen's Council's influence as well. All three men took to the streets of Hoxie and spread their leaflets, pamphlets, and propaganda. With their help, Hoxie felt justified to resist.

Johnson wanted to harness the segregationist support in the South and influence southern politicians to take a public stand against integration. In the next couple of weeks, the Hoxie situation faded and a federal judge banned Johnson and his cohorts from interfering with integration any further. Johnson used this injunction and the Governor of Arkansas's lack of support to his advantage by riling up white Arkansians against a "tyrannical federal court system."⁷⁹ White organizations targeted Governor Orval Faubus for his silence and inaction. For segregationist politicians across the Deep South, resisting *Brown* preserved a life of comfort, tradition, and racism. They joined as quick as they could. For

⁷⁷ Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Washington, DC: The Smithsonian Institution, 2000), Print, 252.

⁷⁸ Reed, *Faubus*, 170.

⁷⁹ Reed, *Faubus*, 172.

Faubus, waiting for the situation to diffuse itself and deflecting responsibilities onto local authorities looked more appealing. Could he remain neutral throughout this period of resistance? Other politicians looked to him to declare his loyalties with the opposition, but instead he stayed silent. Faubus preferred not to intervene in issues between the federal government and the people.

Governor Faubus' carried tremendous weight and influence as governor of the state. He was a white politician from rural Arkansas and had the opportunity to join the other white southern politicians in resistance. Originally, Faubus ran for office on a "progressive advocate of economic development" platform.⁸⁰ He was extremely unpopular in Little Rock, perceived as a "pawn of crooks, an uncouth hillbilly, and probably a Crypto-Communist," given his rural upbringing.⁸¹ Despite these feelings, Faubus tried to consider the liberal and conservative sides to lead a neutral campaign. He worked on two specific projects that proved successful and influential for years to come. The first involved property reassessment and the second a revamping of the Arkansian economic foundation from agricultural to industrial.⁸² Faubus moved quickly on new legislation and went farther than simply supervising the state governing bodies. He wanted to show he could follow through on his campaign promises, and sure enough he succeeded.

White segregationists recognized the influence Governor Faubus possessed in revering *Brown*. They sought out his support. However, Faubus desired to stay relatively removed from the debate to secure his reelection. In the past, Faubus had appointed exceptional African American citizens, such as Daisy Bates, with certificates of honor and

⁸⁰ Patterson, *Brown v. Board*, 110.

⁸¹ Reed, *Faubus*, 131.

⁸² Reed, *Faubus*, 139.

acclamation.⁸³ White politicians and professionals understood his actions to be betrayal and treason, which meant Faubus was not completely outside the realm of racial tensions in the state. He existed somewhere in the middle of the conversation and felt fearful about interjecting between white supremacists and the African American community. Faubus record did not match other southern politicians, which isolated him from his southern peers. This created pressure around his response to *Brown*. In addition to Faubus' influence, the city looked to the Little Rock School Board for a segregationist reaction.

Virgil T. Blossom developed a plan to begin gradually integrating public high schools in Little Rock and looked to Governor Faubus for political backing. As the newly appointed superintendent, Virgil T. Blossom transferred from Fayetteville, Arkansas to become the head of the Little Rock School Board. After the Court handed down *Brown*, Blossom immediately began working on a plan of action to integrate his school system as smoothly as possible. The state needed to start somewhere. Everyone moved forward with caution and Blossom was not excluded from this approach. He crafted a plan he thought could balance gradualism and integration in order to keep violent reactions from the white resistance at a minimum. Blossom respect for the system and long time commitment to public schools led him to support integration. The people of Little Rock even voted him 'Man of the Year' for 1955 in an *Arkansas Democrat* poll.”⁸⁴

Despite his commitment, Blossom chose gradualism instead of demanding the people accept *Brown*. He believed they did need some extra time to adjust in order to facilitate a smooth transition from segregation to integration. The Blossom Plan prioritized high schools first and moved downward from there. By 1963, the state would hopefully achieve complete

⁸³ Reed, *Faubus*, 163.

⁸⁴ Reed, *Faubus*, 182.

integration. His outline allowed for only select black students at every stage, which he included in order to not overwhelm the state. Central High School accepted seventeen black students and scheduled to integrate in September of 1957. If everything went according plan, Blossom would become the man who beat the odds and carried Arkansas through the dark times of integration. Unfortunately, the city had a different plan in mind when nine black students showed up for their first day of school that fall.

Conclusion

In a historic moment of southern solidarity, the Governor of Arkansas decided to try and remain neutral and removed from the segregationist atmosphere. The Little Rock School Board, headed by superintendent Virgil Blossom, felt differently. It moved forward with a proposed plan of integration. It was when white southerners tried to be moderate or neutral in this moment of solidarity that problems arose. Faubus and Blossom could not work together to calm the city and peacefully integrate Central High School. Little Rock, Arkansas soon attracted national attention and the nation watched as Central transformed into a violent battleground for the segregationist agenda.

Previously argued cases on segregation, before *Brown*, reveal a detailed relationship between segregation and equal rights. The Court reviewed this relationship and delivered their opinion in favor of integration. However, *Brown* provoked certain states, such as Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Delaware, Maryland, and Arkansas, to respond in favor of segregation. The WCC and plans of gradualism, such as the Blossom Plan, were part of this response. White segregationists used the WCC and local politicians to validate their response and help work towards an organized plan of resistance. Above others, Arkansas' administration and the relationship between Governor Faubus and Superintendent Virgil

Blossom would stand out. Although Faubus would prefer it, integration in Arkansas could not be postponed and the first day of school was rapidly approaching.

Chapter 2

The First Month of Resistance: Little Rock Gains National Attention

Introduction

In April of 1957, a few months before Central High School was set to integrate, The Capital Citizen's Council released a pamphlet titled, "Race Mixing in Little Rock High Schools Can be Stopped by the Governor." They offered a solution. The Council suggested that only with the help of Governor Faubus could desegregation be reversed. Influenced by Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland's beliefs, the Council drew from a recent speech, stating, "The effective way to oppose integrated schools and this attack on a segregated society is through the governments of the states...As long as the state governments stand firm, I have no fear of the outcome."⁸⁵ The open letter from the Council asked Governor Faubus, as executive head of the state, to act in accordance to his racial interests, "You Governor, and you alone, can act on this most serious matter - - will you?"⁸⁶ The Council soon received an answer.

In this chapter, I argue Little Rock, Arkansas exposed the South's dependency on segregation through political defiance and poor organization. Faubus' calling of the Arkansas National Guard and Blossom's gradual plan tried to make integration easier on the white segregationists encouraging their resistance. Through consistent efforts on the part of white organizations and Governor Faubus' subtle alliance with the segregationist groups, Central High School appeared to be the moment many southerners were waiting to witness. The nation needed to watch the white segregationists' battle for their racial hierarchy and protest

⁸⁵ Capital Citizen's Council, "Capital Citizen's Council Opposes 'Race Mixing'," Pamphlet, Pulaski County, Arkansas, April 30 1957, <http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/Civilrights/id/882/rec/1>. 2.

⁸⁶ Capital Citizen's Council, "Capital Citizen's Council Opposes 'Race Mixing'," 2.

for their white children to remain in white classrooms, untouched by the rest of the community.

Section One: Political and Social Organization in Little Rock

In September, Governor Faubus called on Superintendent Blossom the night before Central High's first day of school. To help the governor figure out a position on desegregation, Blossom identified three possible options. He could publically declare his allegiance to the segregationist cause, and fall in line with other southern politicians, which would require a public statement of defiance to the federal government. He could issue a different statement supporting Blossom's Plan for integration and the *Brown* decision, or he could call on the National Guard to stall the process. On September 2, he issued a private order to General Clinger of the Arkansas National Guard, reading,

“You are directed to place off limits to white students those schools for colored students and to place off limits to colored students those schools heretofore operated and recently set up for white students. This order will remain in effect until the demobilization of the guard or until further orders.”⁸⁷

This choice solidified Faubus' support from the segregationist voters for his next term and alienated the black vote. Originally, a significant black vote placed Faubus into office back in 1955. However, Faubus failed to provide support to the black community during desegregation. The Governor felt that by staying out of the desegregation debate, he could repay the African American community, but he only appeared to be a passive bystander.⁸⁸ This was not an option given the pressure Faubus received from the rest of the South and federal government.

⁸⁷ Ravi K. Perry, and D. LaRouth Perry, *The Little Rock Crisis: What Desegregation Politics Says about Us* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Print, 87.

⁸⁸ David Wallace, “The Central Figure at Little Rock Central High School,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (1980): 314-329. Here 318.

In 1957, Faubus could no longer deflect any responsibility onto local law enforcement. The segregationists convinced Faubus that if he defied them his political career would turn to ruin.⁸⁹ Blossom's Plan would take effect in the fall of 1957, which effectively put a time limit on Faubus' opportunity to react. Once the first day of school arrived, Faubus' would no longer be able to sit quietly in the back ground. He would be expected to make a choice about where he fell on the Southern reaction spectrum. That night, Faubus broadcasted his decision. He decided to issue a private order, he explained that "the mission of the soldiers was 'to maintain or restore order and to protect the lives and property of citizens.'"⁹⁰ Faubus claimed he would never attempt to obstruct federal justice. However, calling the National Guard suggested Faubus' interest in maintaining peace without allowing the implementation of integration. If segregation maintained peace, then in order to implement the new law, peace would be disrupted. The nation realized this disruption was unavoidable.

The federal government challenged the South while the rest of the nation watched the South's aggressive reaction play out on the first day of school at Central High. According to Blossom's plan, nine students would integrate and commence his three-year plan for a smooth transition to desegregation. In the morning, all nine students arrived at Central, where they were met with the National Guard and an angry white mob. Escorting the children to school, the NAACP could not believe Faubus deployed armed guardsmen to refuse black children admittance. Now that the National Guard blockaded the school, the federal government intervened.

⁸⁹ Ben F. Johnson, "After 1957: Resisting Integration in Little Rock." *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (2007): 258-83. Here 266.

⁹⁰ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 264-265.

On September 3, Little Rock's leading segregationist lawyer, Amis Guthridge, met with his pastor, James Wesley Pruden. They discussed a strategy for the White Citizen's Council. Guthridge, a segregationist lawyer in Little Rock and a member of the WCC, considered himself a public figure. Pruden, a pastor for the local Methodist church, supported the Council by helping organize events the past summer. Both men wanted to persuade Faubus to promote the Council and acknowledge the sexual undertones of race-mixing. Guthridge went as far as to threaten Faubus publically making remarks about his inability to pick the right side to support.⁹¹

Pruden launched multiple attacks on Faubus and Blossom attempting to enlighten them about the potential dangers of integration. In one instance, he used an advertisement to relay his concerns, such as co-ed dances, shower rooms, PTA meetings, and "whether black males and white females would enact 'tender love scenes' in school dramas."⁹² He is quoted in the April 1958 *White Citizen's Council* publication saying, "Circulars were distributed. Slowly, the latent segregation sentiment of the city began to crystalize," fondly looking back at the beginning of his segregationist journey.⁹³ Now, he sought support in other organizations to broaden the White Citizens' Council's audience.

The newly founded Mother's League of Central High School joined Pruden's community as an affiliate organization. Each group held a significant amount of influence to their respective supporters. The WCC spoke to its congregation and the League spoke to Central's parents and their children. The League feared the possibility of a new generation of bi-racial children who could sympathize with the "white way of life" and the "black way of

⁹¹ Perry and Perry, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 83.

⁹² Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 256.

⁹³ *White Citizen's Council Magazine* 3 No 7 (1958).

life.” Mothers, and largely housewives, spearheaded the cause. They influenced their children’s actions and opinions. Central High School was full of white girls and boys raised by segregationist mothers viciously protecting the ideologies they instilled in their children.

In a pamphlet supported by the Mother’s League, women described steps to protecting your children from integration. The second step is to teach tolerance. The information given under this heading explained how integrationist teach young Christian children tolerance of their black classmates. Tolerance instilled a sense of white guilt in the child.⁹⁴ This example of propaganda circulated in order to protect children by educating mothers. The Little Rock Mothers League felt pamphlets such as this one warned families about the dangers of integration and broke the information down into an easily understandable step-by-step process.

In Little Rock, the crusade for segregation was primarily led by white mothers using targeted propaganda. Consisting of Central High mothers and other housewives, they resisted segregation in an organized fashion by holding religious meetings at the Methodist church, and petitioning the members of the school board for resignation. In the first month of integration, the Mother’s League wrote a letter to the school. In a letter to the principal of Central High, Jess Matthews, the League explained the principal’s lack of attention to reprimanding a negro girl for kicking a white boy and another negro girl for cursing a white girl.⁹⁵ Specific examples such as these target Matthews, but have no way of being validated. The purpose of their letter was to list ten grievances and concerns. This list ranged from

⁹⁴ “Three Steps to Mongrelization: A Blueprint for the Destruction of our Christian-American Civilization,” pamphlet, date unknown.

⁹⁵ “Mothers League Letter to Jess Matthews,” Margaret C. Jackson to Jess Matthews. December 13, 1957. Little Rock, Arkansas. 1.

Matthews' assumed sympathies for the blacks to Daisy Bates' free access to Central High.⁹⁶

The Mother's League drafted this targeted letter because they wanted expose Matthews inability to "protect" their white children.

Mothers had the time and resources to spend campaigning against local legislature, protesting Central High, and teaching their children about segregation. Children would soon become responsible for protecting themselves from integration inside Central High School and families needed to spread their segregationist views before children reached the classroom. Mothers realized it became harder to protect their young white children from black children when only an integrationist teacher controlled their environment. Mothers passed out leaflets, such as the "Three Steps to Mongrelization," complete with interracial photos and race-mixing propaganda. This specific handout used three steps to explain the propaganda, stating, "Mix the Schools," "Teach them 'Tolerance'," and "Integrate the Churches."⁹⁷ The pictures included are meant to scare other white mothers and their families who cannot bare to visualize their young white daughters alongside black men. One caption read, "This girl, on honeymoon with her Negro husband, will make her parents proud someday – with mulatto grandchildren," enforcing the idea of corrupted genealogy by race mixing.⁹⁸ Once again, children and this idea of innocence is brought in to convince people of a different, less desirable future post-integration. Children would become responsible for protecting themselves from integration.

The Mother's League, Guthridge, and Pruden held on to a narrative by fighting segregation through a distinguished platform. The white narrative they envisioned involved

⁹⁶ "Mothers League Letter to Jess Matthews," 2.

⁹⁷ "Three Steps to Mongrelization."

⁹⁸ "Three Steps to Mongrelization."

living an untouched, simple life separated from the black race while claiming they cared about the black community. Separation was safe and integration was messy. This battle at Central allowed white mothers to define this narrative and fight to prevent their children from “corruption.” They stood for what their own parents stood for; providing a life for their children similar to the one they lived.

As Purden and Guthridge schemed, they considered how their groups should be represented to the public and believed the Council and Mother’s League collectively built a respectable public face. They stayed organized and passionate. On Central’s first day, the White Citizen’s Council and the Mother’s League arrived ready to protest alongside angry white southerners with what Pete Daniel refers to as an “invisible agenda.”⁹⁹ The mob allowed the WCC and League to step outside their petitions and letters. In the mob, they blended in with the rest of the angry, passionate whites. This day would represent the coming together of all segregationists, both local and from neighboring states.

Section Two: The First Week and Federal Intervention

On September 4, nine black students from Horace Mann High school arrived for their first day of school at Central High. The National Guard stood armed surrounding the entrance, which at this time, was overflowing with angry white protesters. The Guard’s mission was to prevent any African American from entering or leaving the premises. Faubus believed the Guard would settle down the mob outside because of their instruction to stop integration. White southerners mobilizing outside Central fought off any black person in the surrounding vicinity of Central High School. Segregationists protesting felt a newfound confidence with Faubus’ aid of the National Guard. Throughout the crowd, fathers kicked

⁹⁹ Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 257.

black reporters and mothers pushed black students off the sidewalks, “The Citizens’ Council, The Mother’s League, disgruntled parents, students, and pastors formed the crowd’s core.”¹⁰⁰ These families yelled and spit at Elizabeth Eckford, a black student, who arrived separate from her peers. Her face would soon be plastered across magazines and newspapers as an image depicting the hate white citizens felt for the black population. Eckford remembered hearing the shouts from white students and their friends, yelling, “Nigger go on to your own school, you have better schools than we do,” and “Nigger go back to Africa,” to name a few.¹⁰¹

Eckford’s experience speaks to the severity of the first day of school at Central High. Eckford missed the call from Daisy Bates, the NAACP coordinator, meant to alert Eckford the other students planned to meet before heading to the high school. She arrived alone and unprotected. The white resistance took full advantage of her vulnerability and followed Eckford through the streets. In these pivotal moments, Will Counts, a photographer, took Eckford’s photograph as she made her way to the school closely surrounded by a white mob.¹⁰² He captured a moment in history that would explain the white hostility consuming Little Rock, Arkansas, and provide the nation with undisputable proof southern states would not easily surrender.

The same morning, prominent black reporting journalists arrived at Central High School looking to report on what they knew would be an eventful scene. L. Alex Wilson showed up that day accompanied by Jimmy Hicks, Moses Newson, and Early Davy. The men represented the Tri-State Defender’s office, the Amsterdam News of New York City,

¹⁰⁰ Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 261.

¹⁰¹ Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 22

¹⁰² David Margolick, "Through the Lens, Darkly," *Vanity Fair* (Sept. 2007).

and a local black newspaper. Wilson led his group through the crowd as he tried to get a better look at the white mob, unaware of what would come next. As a senior member of his group of friends, Wilson assumed he could protect his fellow reporters.¹⁰³ The black reporters were the first black people the mob encountered that morning. Some white men jumped in front of them and began shouting threatening statements, such as, “Get out of here!” and, “Go home, you son of a bitch nigger.”¹⁰⁴ A man ran up from behind and planted a strong kick to Wilson’s spine just as the stranger’s accomplice kicked him from the side. Wilson kept moving and never expressed any fear. He kept a steady pace as the punches kept coming, but told himself to simply pick up his hat and pull himself back together. A third agitator jumped on Wilson’s back wrapping his arm around Wilson’s neck in a stranglehold. The final white man approached Wilson with a brick and gave him his last blow to the head. Wilson tumbled down as the mob eased back. His attackers acted as the Little Rock Nine snuck in through a side door and entered the building safely. Distracted by the black reporters, the mob acted out their frustrations through violence on men from out of town. Later on, Wilson and his friends wrote their stories and reported on the scene that day that could only be described as brutal. In addition to the degradation that day, Wilson later on showed signs of Parkinson’s Disease brought on by his beating in Little Rock.¹⁰⁵

The next day, the School Board asked the District Court to stop any continued plans of integration. Now that the scene was becoming increasingly threatening to American citizens, the federal government intervened urging Governor Faubus to dismiss the National Guard before they took further action. President Eisenhower stood unconvinced by Faubus’

¹⁰³ Hank Klibanoff, “L. Alex Wilson: A Reporter Who Refused to Run,” *Media Studies Journal* 14 (2000).

¹⁰⁴ Klibanoff, “L. Alex Wilson.”

¹⁰⁵ Klibanoff, “L. Alex Wilson.”

reasons to keep them there and demanded he follow the federal constitution with full cooperation. Three days later, on September 8, the Governor went on national television to re-affirm his stand against integration because of the violent repercussions. The violence condemned the white mobs and white-led organizations. Faubus indirectly argued the presence of African Americans would spark this violent behavior from white citizens and therefore it was impossible to integrate the public schools. He called himself the “Preservator of the peace,” yet would not acknowledge the violent behavior of the white mobs.

Federal Judge Davies stepped in, ruling that Governor Faubus failed to use his troops “to preserve law and order and enjoined him and the National Guard from interfering with integration.”¹⁰⁶ Faubus mentioned Davies in a broadcast and called on federal employees to offer any solution better than the National Guard to calm the white mobs. The governor asked the community for suggestions because he could not find a reasonable solution on his own. Faubus did not find a better solution that would appease segregationists and integrationists watching his every move. On September 23, the Little Rock Police Department faced 1,000 rampaging white citizens outside Central High School. Integration was back in action. The nine black students snuck in through a side door on September 23, but fled a couple hours later for their own safety.

Faubus wanted to remain private, but could not hide much longer when Little Rock became the scene of mob violence. It appeared contradictory to protect the school from violence while allowing a violent white mob to congregate. Faubus wanted to maintain prevent violence, but inherently halted the nation’s progress and obstructed the enforcement of *Brown*. Faubus was backed into a corner. He felt pressure from the network of Southern

¹⁰⁶ Little Rock Timeline, “Chronology of Events,” Little Rock, Arkansas, date unknown.

politicians watching his every move. In Alabama, for example, George Wallace embarked on a speaking tour with the tagline “We will never surrender,” to promote segregation.¹⁰⁷

Compared to Faubus, Wallace was showing support to his southern neighbors. The rest of the South saw Faubus’ order as reactionary and a step in the right direction. Other Southern politicians radically spoke out against integration in order to mobilize white citizens and publicize their support for segregation. David Wallace refers to these other southern politicians as “coolly manufacturing a crisis,” by speaking out using their political position and influence.¹⁰⁸ Senator James O. Eastland demonstrated this support with a pointed speech on white culture.

Senator Eastland gave a speech with religious and racist rhetoric to call on white segregationists to honor and preserve their racial heritage. The Federation for Constitutional Government published Eastland’s speech and circulated it among the South in November 1955 from their temporary headquarters in New Orleans, Louisiana. The pamphlet led with an open letter to “fellow Americans,” requesting their assistance to preserve American tradition. The organization emphasized certain sentences in their letter, such as “courageous political leaders at all levels – national, state, and city, must have organized support. If we fail them, they face defeat or discouragement. REMEMBER, THE MINORITY PRESSURE GROUPS ARE UNITED AND UNTIRING.”¹⁰⁹ Their pamphlet urged people to react. Senator Eastland’s speech reinforced this message. In his own words, Eastland asks the people of Mississippi and all southerners to keep in mind “the death of Southern culture and our aspirations as an Anglo-Saxon people,” when they considered joining the fight.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Carter, *The Politics of Rage*, 163.

¹⁰⁸ Wallace, “The Central Figure at Little Rock Central High School,” 329.

¹⁰⁹ “Federation for Constitutional Government,” Pamphlet, New Orleans, Louisiana, November, 1955. 1.

¹¹⁰ “Federation for Constitutional Government,” 2.

In Blossom's personal edition of the pamphlet, he questioned Eastland's platform, but maintained his allegiance to gradualism. He underlined Eastland's message and wrote in the margins, "Is Politics so dear? And life so cheap that a mixed mongrel race would be Nixon's pride? God Forbid! If this be treason make the most of it."¹¹¹ Blossom's commentary gives insight into the struggle between southern politicians and the different approaches white men took to combat integration. Gradualism slows down the process even if it does not halt it completely whereas Eastland's approach aims to tear down segregation by fighting back against organizations such as the NAACP. Eastland described *Brown* as a threat. It provoked a war against racial culture. The pamphlet's opening letter describes a white culture that can only be preserved and protected by what they deem a "constitutional form of government."¹¹² Eastland and the Federation of Constitutional Government as examples of southern, political opposition. Faubus felt pressured to join Eastland and George Wallace. He is the governor of Arkansas and therefore a member of the white supremacist community by association. Without a strong political community against the Northern liberals the chances of reversing *Brown* were slim to none.

In 1971, Governor Faubus reflected on his time in office and attempted to give clarity to his audiences. Faubus stated, "If I had ever gotten in the position that the people of Arkansas lost faith in me or thought that I had just surrendered or that I had turned against them, all hell might have broken loose," trying to define the delicate balance between segregationists and Southern moderates in Arkansas.¹¹³ He felt like a puppet. Issuing the

¹¹¹ "Federation for Constitutional Government," 2.

¹¹² "Federation for Constitutional Government," 1.

¹¹³ "The Faubus Papers: Little Rock Desegregation Crisis" Little Rock Desegregation Crisis, 1957-1959 Oral Histories. Fayetteville, Arkansas. Manuscript Collection MS/F27/301/FAUBUS. 74.

order on Sunday for the following Tuesday, Faubus made a calculated decision to try and protect the people of Arkansas from violence. He made a miscalculation.

By ordering the National Guard, Governor Faubus effectively gave the violent mobs a pass to act as they saw fit. The Guard protected the white students inside the school rather than facilitating a peaceful integration. Faubus finally chose who to protect. Before this, “the governor’s response was to maintain a low profile. He refused to condemn the segregationist agitators, but he also refused to help the besieged school board,” and now he chose to speak up.¹¹⁴ The moment arrived. As head of the Little Rock School Board and Governor of the state, the nation looked to Blossom and Faubus to transition Little Rock, Arkansas into the next era of education.

Before Eisenhower’s decision to intervene, the President appeared removed from the desegregation decision because he dreaded the idea of intervening in the South’s affairs. He hoped the courts would settle the matter locally. Eisenhower knew the weight of his presidential position, but chose to remain relatively inactive, “While Congress was rendered inactive by deadlock, the Eisenhower administration was inactive by choice – as well as from seemingly intrinsic inability to come to a decision or take an action in the field of civil rights.”¹¹⁵ He possessed little patience for emotional responses and felt white southerners’ emotions avoided their legal and moral obligation to uphold the Constitution.

Faubus’ reaction seemed emotional and unfounded. The law appeared plain and simple. Regardless of emotional readiness, Eisenhower did acknowledge the alternative response to desegregation and agreed to gradual change to help prepare the southern states for a new social reality. He believed this change would be respected and upheld when white

¹¹⁴ Reed, *Faubus*, 173.

¹¹⁵ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 61.

southerners came to respect the law in due time. This was an optimistic and unrealistic vision.

Eisenhower never publically expressed his support for the *Brown v. Board* decision, but rather took the same passive approach as Governor Faubus. To take a public position on desegregation meant to oppose the entire southern way of life, in favor of a drastic change. The racial hierarchy was at stake.

The Supreme Court decided to support drastic change and the President and Arkansas Governor could not find the strength to publically enforce such a reversal as *Plessy*. They felt that slowing down the court's decision was in the long-run a thoughtful position to take because of the hostile environment of segregation in the South. Eisenhower and his advisors felt this was a problem for the federal courts to resolve, "at a time when many southern leaders were belligerently championing the doctrine of interposition and when numerous communities had already experienced mob resistance to desegregation, the federal executive branch seemingly relied upon a vague hope that the problem would go away."¹¹⁶ The President preferred to focus national resources towards the Cold War efforts. Now, he felt forced to reprimand the Governor of Arkansas.

On September 24, the 101st Airborne Division consisting of 1,100 officers and men deployed to Fort Campbell, Kentucky. President Eisenhower finally took legal action against the city of Little Rock. The next day, under troop escort, became the first day of uninterrupted high school for the nine black students as they paraded in through the front doors with armed guardsmen at their sides. President Eisenhower scolded Governor Faubus on his use of the National Guard and reminded him the federal government would protect the

¹¹⁶ Bartley., *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 63.

people and the law of the land regardless of mobs and emotional white responses. Faubus felt violated by the federal intervention and humiliated in front of his southern peers. He couldn't turn back now. Faubus immediately spoke out at press conferences trying to persuade the country that the only way for crisis to stop was for integration to stop. The withdrawal of black students from Central would stop the violence because the protesters would no longer have anything to protest. His claims were irrelevant.

The school needed support and throwing the responsibility of desegregation back and forth between groups exhausted all parties. Eisenhower and Faubus believed in stalling and avoiding the big questions only they could answer. The people looked up to their leaders for direction as well as reassurance, but now many white citizens could not find reassurance in Faubus or their president. *Little Rock Today* went into Central and interviewed students to find out how the nine black students survived in such a hostile environment. The article, titled "Eight Kids Who Walk Alone," spoke to the loneliness the Little Rock Nine felt. These images offered proof that the South would not budge.

Little Rock Today investigated violence and harassment within the walls of Central over the course of the first integrated months. The article is titled, "Eight Kids Who Walk Alone," and interviews white children to understand their motivations, suggesting "The segregationist students take their directions from the outside."¹¹⁷ Written by Stan Opotowsky, he analyzes the effects of a militarily occupied public high school and the implications of influential groups such as Governor Faubus, the WCC, and the Mother's League. His findings are supported by interviews with students and school officials. He quotes Virgil Blossom, stating, "Our job is to educate, not eliminate. We are trying to save these 45, not

¹¹⁷ "Eight Kids Who Walk Alone," *Little Rock Today*. 26.

get rid of them. In the first place, these cases of kicking and pushing are the Negro child's word against the white's, and even if we can guess who is wrong, the temper of the community is such that we must be prepared to see each case through court."¹¹⁸ Blossom's reaction does not come as a surprise. The Little Rock School Board was in direct opposition with the community's white families from the beginning. The board decided to support and implement to the best of their abilities an integration plan according to the law of the land. Blossom and his peers were now seeing the effects of their decision through physical violence in the school hallways with kicking, pushing, spitting, threatening, and various other forms of harassment. There wasn't anything that the Little Rock Nine could do in retaliation except keep practicing nonviolent resistance.

White students enforced their parents' mission inside the walls of Central High. Segregationist parents preached the value of segregation to their children because it was essential to continue protesting inside the school in order to maintain a united, segregationist front. The level of investment in the school system for every family is significant because it would produce the next generation of Little Rockians. Inside the school, children continued the fight. Opatowsky identifies Central's white student behavioral problem to expose how little progress the city made with integration. The army believed it was the school's problem to ease tensions between students, but the school turned to the Army to police the halls because they did not have enough staff to police the school themselves.¹¹⁹

In the following months, both sides continued to fight against the opposition until Central expelled black students bullied out of their classrooms. Early in the first semester of school, one incident including a firecracker planted in the bottom of Melba Pattillo Beals

¹¹⁸ "Eight Kids Who Walk Alone," *Little Rock Today*. 27.

¹¹⁹ "Eight Kids Who Walk Alone," *Little Rock Today*. 27.

locker almost left her completely blind. The White Citizen's Council and other organizations promoted the segregationist agenda with their magazines and pamphlets trying to rile up Arkansians about maintaining the protests at Central High School.

The presence of the National Guard sent a message to the people of Little Rock and the greater south. After receiving the *Brown* decision, Faubus treated the Court's ruling as a mere recommendation. Faubus never spoke to the public or issued a warning to protesters if their mob became violent. The head of the School Board, Virgil Blossom, begged Faubus to warn the public about potential consequences if their opposition led to dangerous resistance. Integration needed to be successful in front of the overwhelming audience across the nation. Instead, Governor Faubus waited until two days before the first day of school to take action against integration and call forth the National Guard. George Lewis analyzes Faubus' response by stating, "Faubus was clearly unwilling to be the first such leader to put his name to a concrete strategy of defiance in the face of concerted federal attempts to ensure the desegregation of schools under his control."¹²⁰

In an Editor's Note, an anonymous writer from Long Island, New York wrote, "Most of the people, I think, read it with delight to hear that there is some hope yet to preserve our freedom."¹²¹ Students passed around small business cards with a variety of different phrases printed on them. A few examples include, "ONE DOWN... EIGHT TO GO," "HELP INTEGRATION: Take two niggers home for lunch," and "If You'd Like to Know: *Open Season*," followed by Daisy Bates, Harry S. Ashmore, and Virgil Blossom's home

¹²⁰ Lewis, *Massive Resistance*, 86.

¹²¹ *White Citizen's Council Magazine*, December 1957 Vol 3 No 3.

addresses.¹²² These business cards intended to unify the students inside Central around bullying the Little Rock Nine.

These cards exhibit a commitment to breaking down the spirits of the Little Rock Nine. White students fueled the fight for segregation by resisting *Brown* inside Central where the administration enforced minimal punishment. This form of defiance further demonstrates the white segregationist dependency and willingness to force the African American students out of Central.

Section Three: The Nation Weighs in On Little Rock

This dependency is also demonstrated through men and women around the country sending in hand-written letters, newspaper clippings, and typed statements to Governor Faubus and Virgil Blossom begging them to end integration in Arkansas. The mail poured in with personal anecdotes and threats to share with the men who appeared in charge. Californians expressed different positions compared to segregationist Floridians and Arkansians. Through mail, people could express themselves nonviolently and emotionally. Housewives sent in letters on behalf of their husbands and their own opinions to show solidarity. Men sent in fancy letterhead pages to show their prestige behind the issues they represented. Nonetheless, citizens from around the country paid close attention to Little Rock because it exemplified state's rights in opposition to the federal government. People felt moved to participate in the discussion.

On October 8, one man in Jacksonville, Florida threatened Blossom, writing, "You had better make your piece with our good lord – for your days are few. You are a (great nigger lover) your father was a salve driver. We know all about you and your nigger loving

¹²² Business Cards. Little Rock, Arkansas. 1957.

family. WE are leaving Florida tomorrow for little rock. And may god have mercy on your rotten soul,” signed B.J.C. His sharp words describe the anger he felt thinking about the integration of a school states away. His short note underlined words such as “good lord” and “rotten soul,” emphasizing religious undertones to his remarks. Many sympathizing families packed up the car and drove over to Little Rock for this exact reason. They wanted to stand with their fellow southerners. Another man from closer to home in Pine Bluff, Arkansas sent in his opinions as well.

Lloyd Lawson wrote to the members of the Little Rock School Board. He began his letter by calling attention to the significant influence Little Rock holds over the rest of the schools in the state. As the capitol, Little Rock set a precedent for Pine Bluff and other counties. Lawson referred to white schools and the security of maintaining segregation as a “continuation of our way of life,” aiming to passive aggressively guilt the school board members into leaving segregation alone.¹²³ He referenced their legacy in Arkansian history and the shame children would feel about their ancestors integrating their schools if the board chose incorrectly, but if they chose correctly, Lawson suggested a monument erected in their honor. He continued on to claim,

“There is no need for any school officials to give in to this decision of the Supreme Court. That is not the law of the land. Congress has been elected to pass the laws for this nation and no law of that kind was ever passed by the Congress. The Supreme Court is to guard the Constitution against unlawful legislation, not to make laws of its own.”¹²⁴

Lawson’s interpretation of the Supreme Court, entire judicial system, and federal government align with his unwillingness to accept *Brown v. Board of Education*. He refused

¹²³ "Lloyd Lawson to the Little Rock School Board," Letter to Virgil Blossom. July 27, 1955. Pine Bluff, Arkansas, 1.

¹²⁴ "Lloyd Lawson to the Little Rock School Board," 1.

to acknowledge the validity of the *Brown*. His letter threatened the school board with infamy and their own unborn grandchildren's opinions to try and scare them into segregation. He reminded them he could not think of a single Little Rockian child who supported integration. This comment brings in the significance of young children and racial mixing. Lawson indirectly hints at the anxieties surrounding unprotected young children interracial mixing in classrooms, on the playground, and so on. They are vulnerable because they are easily influenced. This was a large threat to Lawson and white segregationist parents. The letter ends with a swift, "Be men," and "give hope to the millions of people all over the nation."¹²⁵

Lawson wanted to evoke a southern, Arkansian pride from the school board by ranting on about protecting the children and a southern way of life. Is the southern way of life defined by segregation? This question speaks volumes to the angry, white, and violent white mob outside Central High School. On September 4, the public high school meant everything to the fight. B.J.C and Lloyd Lawson represent the outspoken men headed to Little Rock to protect what they saw was rightfully theirs as white men. This perspective is not representative of the entire nation, as Lawson believes, and is challenged by a thoughtful note sent from California.

On October 8, a housewife from Inglewood, California signed Mrs. John Jamar sent Virgil Blossom a notecard with her thoughts on The Blossom Plan. Jamar sent her apologies to Blossom in regards to his integration plan failing in Little Rock. She mentioned writing to Mayor Mann about Governor Faubus' poor actions. Jamar makes a thoughtful observation to follow up, stating, "an all negro school district adjoins two white school districts, and I have wondered if, or why not, some white children have not been enrolled in the negro school,"

¹²⁵ "Lloyd Lawson to the Little Rock School Board," 2.

suggesting an opportunity for Blossom and state redemption in the national arena.¹²⁶ Jamar represented another concerned citizen moved to write to Little Rock directly and offer opinions about the dramatic southern integration process. She added at the very end of his note, "P.S. I am "'white'," in quotation marks.

Jamar did not want to be confused with another racial identity. She wanted Blossom to understand this note was from someone who lived as a white person in modern America. Her words mean something different now that Blossom knows she is a white person supporting integration from a far off western town. In comparison to B.J.C and Lawson, Jamar approaches the school board in a pleasant manner offering her condolences and a new plan of attack. The segregationists used guilt and empty threats as a means of interacting with Blossom, which gave off a different tone and understanding compared to Jamar's notecard. All white men were acutely informed of the Little Rock integration process. Looking from California to Florida to local Pine Bluff, Governor Faubus and Virgil Blossom received the opinions of many Americans across the nation interested in weighing in on the crisis unfolding down south. These opinions did not necessarily influence Faubus and Blossom. Blossom felt stuck in his position as Superintendent without a public alliance with Faubus. The administration in Little Rock, and in Arkansas, looked weak to the rest of the nation. They appeared disorganized with poor communication between offices. Faubus aligned himself with other Southern politicians, while Blossom captained the sinking ship that was the Little Rock School Board. The first month of integration at Central High exhausted the city, but successfully expressed the segregationist voice to the rest of the nation. Segregation would not be easily implemented without a long, difficult struggle.

¹²⁶ "John Jamar Letter to Virgil Blossom." Letter from John Jamar, Mrs. October 8, 1957. Inglewood, California.

Conclusion

The days surrounding the first day of school at Central and the following month gave the nation and the federal government an idea of the struggle many white Americans felt trying to fight against *Brown v. Board of Education* in order to maintain their comfortable, white lifestyle. Their culture was at stake, founded on a hierarchy created by white southerners for centuries. Governor Faubus, Superintendent Blossom, the White Citizen's Council, The Mother's League of Central High School, southern politicians, and various groups around the nation prayed for the segregationist agenda to reinstate this hierarchy. Nine African American students faced endless harassment from their white peers and numerous protesters, which they took silently in order to uphold the law. Even Black reporters could not perform their jobs. President Eisenhower worked to enforce this law without publically declaring his personal opinion on desegregation, but could not ignore his duty to implement Supreme Court decisions with the power of his executive office. The country could not hide from the debate. White southerners arrived at a crossroads choosing between their beloved white culture and allowing their black peers to exercise their fundamental rights. In 1957, this crossroads was visible to the nation and white Arkansians stood up for their southern culture in public offices and on the frontlines of Central High School.

September 4, 1957 proved to be the culmination of social anxieties and racial tensions that gave the nation a visual understanding of violence behind *Brown v. Board of Education*. Southerners from neighboring states arrived in the capitol to see how far they could push the nation backwards by testing *Brown*. People flocked to support their fellow white supremacists and mobilize against African American groups such as the NAACP. This day

became a significant win for the white masses because Governor Faubus decided to step forward in support of segregation by ordering the National Guard to suppress potential violence. People in the North and West watched the story of Little Rock unfold before their eyes. White citizens prepared to fight for their school systems while indirectly fighting for their own lives that benefited from segregation in other spaces. In the next week, the nation stood by as the National Guard barricaded black people from entering the front doors, including black reporters, and the 101st Airborne doing the opposite. The school board took a step back and regrouped, but couldn't keep people around the country from getting involved through letters and notes expressing their concern over the course of the next two years.

The segregationist South was dependent on the segregationist school system because it held in place the racial hierarchy, which dictated whiteness in society. Education is a pillar of the American identity and threatening the safety of a segregated system struck a nerve in the South. Little Rock provided the location in which Southern segregationists could organize to fight against this shift in the southern way of life. Central High School would forever define this moment in Southern history.

Chapter 3

The Fight Isn't Over: White Reactions to Integration

Introduction

White southerners watched the North transition into an integrated society as they began planning for the upcoming school year. It would be a chance of redemption. They collectively feared societal change because integration possessed the power to equalize communal spaces and threaten white norms. Whites felt entitled to privileges in housing, schools, and politics. After initial integration in 1957, white students and black students shared resources and environments, which taught them to coexist in shared classrooms. The first chapter of this project addressed how the federal government legalized a societal transition and demanded southern states follow *Brown v. Board of Education*. The second chapter provided evidence of resistance from segregationist organizations and Governor Faubus. These chapters explained the South's immediate response to *Brown*. After the Little Rock Nine attended Central High School for the first couple of months, white resistance faded. Protests stopped, and organizations realized their effect on the state government lessened.

This chapter analyzes white responses after September of 1957 in order to explain the continuation of fear and action. I argue that the first year of integration slowed down the segregationist organizations, but did not persuade them that integration would improve the southern way of life. White resistance remained present, but lost its momentum after the fall term. Whites continued to write to Blossom and the School Board expressing their opinions about integration. Fear demonstrated the fundamental way that white southerners understood their racial standing in society, their perspective on the federal government, and how they

chose to move forward processing African American's right to an education. The first year, and following summer, gave the resistance an opportunity to reflect and regroup. They wanted to renew their commitment to segregation.

Segregation provided a legal organization in society that effectively helped dictate white superiority using the law. Because the Constitution supported segregation, this system was credited and moral. One southern essayist, Thomas H. Landess, went as far as to describe southern morals as religious beliefs. He suggested, "what is regarded as quintessentially 'Southern' grows in large measure out of a certain kind of regional orthodoxy."¹²⁷ Northerners trying to change this fact appeared out of place because they stood removed from the personal southern experience of white southern culture, identity, and society deeply connected to southern African Americans. Northern methods for racial inclusion could not be translated into Southern society because the regions possessed different values.¹²⁸ To many southern segregationists, the federal government agreed with Northern methods and therefore banned against the South.

The Supreme Court and federal government could not speak accurately on the southern way of life and therefore were ill-equipped to make laws that directly affected their interests. One letter to the Little Rock School Board stated, "Did you ever stop to think we have thousands of negroes down South whereas the North have a great majority and so few niggers in some communities."¹²⁹ This quote emphasizes the Southern segregationist opinion that the North did not have a substantial black population compared to the South.

¹²⁷ Thomas H. Landess, "A Note of the Origin of Southern Ways," in *Why the SOUTH Will Survive*, ed. Fifteen Southerners (Athens: The University of George Press, 1981), 160.

¹²⁸ Golub, "Remembering Massive Resistance to School Desegregation," 509.

¹²⁹ "Dear Communists," Unknown to Virgil Blossom, September 17, 1958, Texarkana. 2.

With integration, the South lost a part of its identity, and transitioned into a society that appeared more like the North. It was unsettling to southern segregationists. Integration threatened segregationists throughout the school year as it became a new normal. Some white students left Central to attend the new, flourishing private academies in Arkansas.¹³⁰ However, integration in the fall of 1957 set the white resistance back, but not far enough to quit trying to preserve a segregationist South.

Section One: The White Rationale - Race Mixing

Whites wrote in from around the country to punish the Little Rock School Board and Governor Faubus because they recognized Little Rock's lack of faith by allowing complete integration. This year was an opportunity to point out the flaws of integration in progress, which many people took advantage of articulating to the state and local school board. Throughout the first year of integration and the Spring of 1958, whites rationalized their new society by focusing on two specific areas of explanation. The first popular rationalization involved young men and women of different races spending time together.

White men and women sought to rationalize how blacks and whites could safely exist in the same spaces exercising the same rights. To the white resistance, this idea threatened the stability of white people. Instead of trusting their white sons and daughters to make rational decisions, they focused on dehumanizing black children. Now that white and black children were spending time together in the classroom, on the athletic fields, and at school dances, it was inevitable that they would become friendly and potentially intimately involved. Race-mixing was the first significant area of interest for which many white

¹³⁰ Johnson, "After 1957," 281.

Americans expressed serious concern. The second area of concern explained a betrayal of God's word and direct violation of the Bible.

In January of 1959, the Arkansas WCC released a flyer on teen pregnancy and venereal disease increases. This flyer explained the sexual activity of blacks and whites demonstrating the higher sexual drive of black children under the age of fifteen. The Council used data from the chief of the District of Columbia Disease Control Bureau, Dr. John R. Pate. They contrasted racial statistics and suggested an uptick in irresponsible behavior after integrating public schools to instill fear in Arkansian parents. The title of the flyer, "DO WE WANT THIS KIND OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN ARKANSAS?" asked white parents how badly they wanted to protect their children from these reckless sexual behaviors. The Council listed a total of 185 pregnancies and only 16 reported as white children between the ages of thirteen and fifteen.¹³¹ The rest of the children reported included blacks as young as twelve years old. The Venereal Disease Increase section of the flyer reported a total of 896 cases. Out of the white children, five girls and eight boys recorded infection. The overwhelming majority of black children with venereal diseases, totaling 883 students, listed 625 females and 258 males.¹³²

The alarming numbers printed on this flyer begged Arkansian parents to keep fighting against integration, even after the first year of integration. Now, the Council could use the first year against the system of integration to demonstrate the mistake of integration. Malcolm Taylor, President of the Council, printed the flyer as a warning to Arkansian parents, "To those people in Arkansas who think they could accept integrated schools, we

¹³¹ Capital Citizen's Council, "Anti-Integration Flyer Issued by the Capital Citizens' Council," *Arkansas Democrat* (1959).

¹³² Capital Citizen's Council, "Anti-Integration Flyer Issued by the Capital Citizens' Council."

urge that you study the above facts. Is this the kind of schools you want your children to attend?" in hopes of rallying the white resistance once more.¹³³

The flyer about sexual activity indirectly suggests intimacy between white and black children. Race mixing leading to sexual activity is a key motivator for white fear. The White Citizen's Council wanted to scare white parents into believing the listed statistics resulted from black children infecting white children and pregnancies between different races. In addition to this point, the Council suggested a bad influence on white children as a direct result of integration. This flyer is one example of how white fear remained intact after integration. Sexual activity linked to race mixing threatened whites and their perspective of society.

One man wrote an unsigned letter to the School Board explaining his concerns about mixed marriages by describing the power of mixed race photographs. Through different media outlets, including the black press and white press, the author points to interracial scenes on television working to convince children that whites and blacks are the same.¹³⁴ He attached photograph newspaper clippings of "white women in the arms of negro men; a negro woman in the arms of a white man, and a negro husband and white wife with a negro baby; a beautiful white woman dancing in the arms of a negro man," as evidence. He refers to the media's efforts as a propaganda campaign "that is diabolically aimed at destroying the white race in the South."¹³⁵ Mixed race babies, or as this man identifies as negro babies, are the ultimate enemies of the white race. White womanhood was sacred. In a piece by Herman Gray on black masculinity discusses the ongoing anxiety around white women and black

¹³³ Capital Citizen's Council, "Anti-Integration Flyer Issued by the Capital Citizens' Council."

¹³⁴ "To Whom It May Concern," Little Rock, Arkansas. Date Unknown.

¹³⁵ "To Whom It May Concern."

men. Black men are seen as hyper sexualized and aggressive.¹³⁶ White men are the led to feel protective over the women of their race and the ability to reproduce the race.

The author fears the destruction of the white race and therefore his own power as a white man. He feels personally attacked by his local newspaper stands and the inter-racial scenes on TV because they acknowledge the government's agenda of destruction.¹³⁷ The author recognizes images in the media to be forcing whites across the nation to face reality. He accepts the content with a realistic approach, stating, "over 700 mixed marriages per year are taking place," trying to provoke his reader to act. Listing statistics, similar to the Capital Citizen's Council approach, gives the author's analysis a feeling of urgency. Using a comparison to the North, the author references white flight and asks, "Where will we move to?"¹³⁸ With a larger black population in the South, the author cannot see any chance for the white race to hide from this inevitable transition.

In late February, Blossom received two cryptic letters from two southerners in favor of segregation. Both authors threatened Blossom. They wanted him to know their position and wrote with discriminatory terms to instill fear in Blossom moving forward. February was well into the school year, but these southerners did not give up the fight for a segregated, white school. The physical resistance seen in front of Central now transitioned to resistance such as these letters. The men who sent them to Blossom are resisting *Brown*, even months later, but from a distance. They are not convinced of integration by any means. They are continuing to write in and express their grievances about the direction of American public education.

¹³⁶ Herman Gray, "Black Masculinity and Visual Culture," *Callaloo* 18, no. 2 (1995): 401-405. Here 401.

¹³⁷ "To Whom It May Concern."

¹³⁸ "To Whom It May Concern."

The first author, representing The Redfield-Sheridan Coon Hunting Club, sent Blossom a personal letter notifying him of a “COON” hunt taking place in his honor on March 1, 1958. The letter, signed by club president H. E. Koon, describes a graphic hunt of nine young “COONS” for the entertainment of the white gatherers. Written in a mocking manor, the president refers to Central High School as “Daisy Bates Academy,” and Blossom’s Plan as “the ‘COON’ training program at Fayetteville NAACP Academy.”¹³⁹ People saw writing as a way to warn Blossom of what was to come if he did not immediately end integration. This source, using humor, is dangerously dark and exhibits Antebellum era undertones.

On February 11, 1958, a few days later, Blossom received the second notecard in the mail with a short phrase scribbled along the backside. It read, “THERE ARE TWO THINGS GOD DID NOT CREATE A MULE AND A MULATTO.”¹⁴⁰ A mulatto, defined as a person with one black parent and one white parent, is identified in this note as a religiously disgraced status. Paired with the mule, the mulatto is seen as unnatural. To the anonymous author, both creatures are undesirable. A mulatto is the union of both races and symbolizes a physical representation of white and black. A mule represents the union of a horse and a donkey. Comparing a mulatto to a mule creates a pairing of unnatural and unwanted offspring. This note wants Blossom to understand by bringing together young black and white children, this unnatural result is normalized. This notecard addresses the first area of interest, race mixing, and the second area of interest, religion. The author attempts to use cryptic terms to explain a metaphor they believe to be relevant to the mixing of races. As the

¹³⁹ "Racist Letter to Virgil Blossom," Letter to Virgil Blossom. February 19, 1958. Arkansas. Virgil T. Blossom Papers, 1952-1960 (MC 1364, Box 8, File 2).

¹⁴⁰ "Mule and Mulatto." Letter to Virgil Blossom. February 11, 1958. Arkansas.

notecard suggests, bringing together two races will inevitably lead to an unnatural union. It is a warning.

Race-mixing, seen as a significant fear of white segregationists in the South, represented a physical repercussion of *Brown*. White men and women passed around the WWC flyer, saw pictures of interracial couples, used discriminatory language to scare Blossom, and effectively kept the resistance alive during the first year of integration in Little Rock. Visual representation of race-mixing and examples such as the mule and mulatto notecard trigger white segregationists into believing they are losing power over the reproduction of their own race. The whiteness and the purity of their children is under attack by the mere presence of black students in their classrooms. This ideology of anti-race-mixing works to control the population through a racial hierarchy. Segregationists are correct that the hierarchy cannot be dismantled by one year of integration, but if integration continued, the hierarchy would be severely threatened by the possibility that students lost their desire to taunt their African American classmates. Alongside race-mixing, a second rationale of white segregationist surfaced. Religion, another pillar of Southern identity, gave segregationists a plethora of material to reference when making segregationist arguments.

Section Two: The White Rationale - Religion

During desegregation, Christianity provided white southern communities with a foundation of information to preserve their hierarchical society through biblical evidence. The mule and mulatto note hints at God's intentions for this world and believes the mulatto is not blessed by God. Men and women writing to Little Rock often used biblical references, stories, and logic in order to explain why segregation followed God's word. The Bible is used as a reliable, uncompromising source. They understood desegregation as a direct

defiance of Christianity and damned Blossom for his work towards integration. Christian ministers and other citizens of the faith wrote into Little Rock as their act of defiance. Since they could not physically get to Little Rock and the protests were over, writing about religion and education Blossom and Faubus seemed to be the logical next step. They wanted to participate any way they could.

Delivered as an unsigned letter sent to the Little Rock School Board, this letter anonymously, and violently, threatened Blossom for promoting integration. A resident of Texarkana, Arkansas, located on the border of Texas at the southwest corner of Arkansas, the author disclosed his feelings immediately by beginning the letter with “Dear Communists.”¹⁴¹ He threatens Blossom by stating his full support for Governor Faubus, whom he voted for specifically to keep “all white southern children from the association of negroes.” In the author’s opinion, Faubus should be punished, writing, “I sincerely hope each of you will be shot or replaced.”¹⁴² Mentioned throughout his letter, the author believed full-heartedly in shooting the opposition for defying the natural laws of segregation, “God will return this stand of yours in toward you and you’re a million ford and, ah then, tears won’t help you, regrets won’t help you.”¹⁴³ Aside from using poor grammar, he is adamant about pointing out Blossom’s unjust, devilish decision to protect integration this past year.

As a rhetorical text, the Bible is open to interpretation. In this source, the author relies on the Bible as fact. God, as a higher power, is capable of delivering Blossom and his associates’ final punishment. If Blossom admits his wrongdoings, the author suggests God may show mercy. However, the author claims he will never stop trying to expose Blossom’s

¹⁴¹ “Dear Communists,” Unknown to Virgil Blossom. September 17, 1958. Texarkana. 1.

¹⁴² “Dear Communists,” 1.

¹⁴³ “Dear Communists,” 1.

betrayal to his people - white people. Returning to violence on page three, the author threatens Blossom with violence once again, “We hate you just this much in Texarkana and while hate is an awful word, it is what Christ turned his back upon.”¹⁴⁴ God was the highest standard and the author understood integration as defiance. For him, integration was a sin. He wondered why pleasing the negro became more important than protecting white children? In the Bible, God made the negro black. This was the word of God. For this author, if Blossom did not uphold the word of god he deserved to be shot. He writes,

“May God send his destruction down upon you and yours and if Governor Faubus feels Little Rock people are whipped into cold fury, likewise Texarkana is whipped into cold fury by you, Members of the School Board and all are in accord that each should be shot: Blossom and your Atty. showed in their faces the victory they hoped they had gained over our Gov. It reflected in all its filth the gloating grins and swaggering walk of those two men. So, we feel Blossom should be shot. This is too good for all of you Judases.”¹⁴⁵

As a Judas, which the author calls Blossom multiple times throughout the article, Blossom betrays Jesus and joins the black sinners. This letter is yet another example of southern Christian grievances. They see a system wronged by the Arkansas administration and try to help fix it.

In April of 1958, a minister wrote to Little Rock to warn the administration of the sins they committed allowing integration to proceed. The minister, R. A. Raney, felt obligated to send his opinions to the city because of his extensive expertise. In his introduction, Raney explained given his knowledge of the Bible, his ranking falls superior to the School Boards’ understanding of segregation. The Bible allowed Raney to process segregation on a different level, which he believed to be necessary in order to make correct, sound decisions for the state of Arkansas. He goes on to describe how God separated the two races for a reason, “The

¹⁴⁴ “Dear Communists,” 4.

¹⁴⁵ “Dear Communists,” 4.

descendants of Cain and Seth violated this separating law, by mixing the two races, and caused the flood in Noah's day. (See Genesis 6th and 7th chapters.), The violation of Gods separating, segregational law, cost Israel 24,000 deaths in the wilderness," to show the significance of segregated schools and reference what could happen in the future as consequence.¹⁴⁶ Raney understands the world through the Bible and therefore applies this logic to current events. It appears helpful to warn Blossom and Faubus of what their actions will religiously provoke.

For the Christians writing to Blossom, any act of defiance to God's word translated to a betrayal of God's plan. They wanted to alert him of his sins. Segregation is part of God's plan because he separated the races in the first chapter of Genesis. In the author's opinion, God's plan was far superior to Blossom's Plan or Arkansas' support for integration. To demonstrate the validity of his claims, Raney states, "Integration is condemned all through the Bible, but not justified anywhere in the Bible. But since God established Segregation in Creation...it follows that Segregation is a Bible teaching or doctrine."¹⁴⁷ For Christians, the Bible is the ultimate truth and its teachings are a way of life. Raney truly believes segregation is a doctrine of the Bible and therefore a matter of religious, which should be entirely left alone by the courts. Blossom and the Little Rock School Board sinned by allowing Central to integrate. Because Raney understands segregation to be God's plan and a religious matter, he explains how the federal government violated the Constitution by ruling on a strictly religious matter.

¹⁴⁶ "Missionary Baptist Minister Defends Segregation as Biblical," R. A. Raney to Herbert L. Thomas. April 9, 1958. 1.

¹⁴⁷ "Missionary Baptist Minister Defends Segregation as Biblical," 4.

By taking this approach, Raney can cite various Constitutional amendments, such as Article I and II regarding freedom of religion and the right to bear arms.¹⁴⁸ In addition to these articles, Raney lists Article X, Article XIV, and Article XV to address state's rights, naturalized citizenship, and voting rights respectively. Raney's evidence supports his religious understanding of the Constitution. He asks Blossom to point out how the Supreme Court's decision is constitutional because he simply cannot find their reasoning. For Minister Raney, the Constitution and God exist to protect him and other white people because it is God's word, "This matter is not subject to the will of the people, which has been proven by numerous Bible examples. So the only thing that will settle this matter is to let the race stay separate, as God made them, and as has been practiced through the ages. Integration is unfair to all races."¹⁴⁹ His reasoning relies on the ministry and can only be applied through this specific religious approach. His approach is paternalistic and condescending to Blossom. This act of defiance, offering a quasi-education on the Bible, exhibits another form of defiance. The first year at Central was almost over and this minister continued to try and educate the School Board. He would not be the last.

Mrs. Homer Lassiter from Black Oak, Arkansas wrote to Virgil Blossom defending segregation. Arriving in over the summer, her letter explains how she closely follows the news on her radio and the time was right to send her "two cents worth."¹⁵⁰ Mrs. Lassiter refers Blossom to Isaiah 56:10 and 11, quoting, "His watchmen are blind: they are all ignorant, they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber,"

¹⁴⁸ "Missionary Baptist Minister Defends Segregation as Biblical," 5.

¹⁴⁹ "Missionary Baptist Minister Defends Segregation as Biblical," 6.

¹⁵⁰ "Mrs. Homer Lassiter Defends Segregation," Lassiter to Virgil Blossom. September 25, 1958. Arkansas, Virgil T. Blossom Papers, 1952-1960 (MC 1364, Box 11, File 2), 1.

which resemble the preachers of today.¹⁵¹ She wants Blossom to use Little Rock churches to create new schools for the children where they may learn God's word, "Throw a-way all them old Devil inspired History Books. Especially all of them the brainwashes our little white kids that Old Abe Lincoln was a good man or a smart man. He was an old walking mad Devil he was a disgrace to God."¹⁵² Mrs. Lassiter saw God's children threatened by the invasion of the "Heathen." She goes on to discuss who God's chosen people, white people, deserve to be treated according to how they are treated in the Bible. Mixing God's "special people" with the "Negro Heathen" directly contradicts the biblical evidence. White people, she states, are above heathens. Negro Heathens biblically declared servants of servants must be kept in their designated place.¹⁵³ For Mrs. Lassiter, the white children are the scape goats for a deteriorating government.

In the second half of her letter, Mrs. Lassiter expressed her feelings on birth control and the race mixing. According to her beliefs, Margaret Singer's work on approving birth control methods in 1914 was a "curse to God's chosen people."¹⁵⁴ Singer, an educated young woman, prevented future white births and allowed women to go to college avoiding their personal responsibilities to have children. This progression stunted Mrs. Lassiter's vision of white families. According to her logic, Mrs. Lassiter believes white families lessened during this time while black families increased. In the present, she understands this way of life to be upsetting for God and the natural order, "God is going to says it's enough one of these days before the Negro boys calls our Little White Girls."¹⁵⁵ After standing by for a year, Mrs.

¹⁵¹ Isaiah 56:10-11.

¹⁵² "Mrs. Homer Lassiter Defends Segregation," 1.

¹⁵³ "Mrs. Homer Lassiter Defends Segregation," 2.

¹⁵⁴ "Mrs. Homer Lassiter Defends Segregation," 4.

¹⁵⁵ "Mrs. Homer Lassiter Defends Segregation," 4.

Lassiter sends in her opinions on integration. She understands integration to be a gateway into destroying white families and God's word. From her perspective in Black Oaks, Arkansas, Blossom's integration work completely threatened the future of God's chosen people.

To these three citizens, the Bible held more credibility than any other source. The evidence they provided from different passages becomes the truth. Blossom's Plan appears to be a compromise between the administration and black people in order to please the black people and give nothing to the whites. This mode of action is unfamiliar and a violation of the Bible's clear intentions for white people to be above all other groups. The blacks, or heathens, cannot be trusted or acknowledged as anything other than sinners. The Bible is God's word and God's word is the ultimate truth. For some, to go against this truth is punishable by death or damnation.

The influence of churches around the South was incredibly powerful and persuaded many white congregation to follow the lead of their ministers. Jason Sokol explains, "Many whites thought their system of race relations found sanction in the Bible," similar to Minister R. A. Raney enforcement that the racial order maintained by segregation was God's will.¹⁵⁶ Segregationists viewed their racial hierarchy as divinely justified and blessed because God believed in separation of the races all the way back to the beginning of time. Who was the Supreme Court to question God's plan? Close to half of white southerners attended Baptist churches and sought comfort in the Southern Baptist Convention, or SBC, sermons. The Christian faith, including Baptists, worked nicely with the messages of many southern white organizations at the time of desegregation. However, one organization in particular felt

¹⁵⁶Jason Sokol, *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006) Print, 101.

deeply intertwined with southern religion and racism; the Klu Klux Klan. Will Campbell, a chaplain from Mississippi, spoke to this relationship by stating, “white supremacy would retain a stranglehold on southern religion, as it had done with much else in society and culture. ‘The real danger...is not racism per se, but that racism becomes a part of faith. The Klan... has left its stamp, not only on the pulpit Bible but on the minds and hearts of generations yet unborn.’”¹⁵⁷ Sokol suggests the question of race relations is inherently spiritual. Proven by Mrs. Homer Lassiter, the anonymous Texarkana author, and Minister R. A. Raney, religion had everything to do with race relations and segregation. God possessed the power to maintain this racial hierarchy.

After analyzing how white segregationists rationalized integration throughout the 1957-1958 academic year, it appeared many citizens remained committed to the fight. Mrs. Lassiter and Minister R. A. Raney explained the consequences of the School Board’s behavior and warned the administration about long-term, dangerous effects of desegregation. Referring back to Mississippi judge Tom Brady, “The loveliest and the purest of God’s creatures, the nearest thing to an angelic being that reads this terrestrial ball is a well-bred, cultured Southern white woman or her blue-eyed, golden-haired little girl,” and she must be protected.¹⁵⁸

The numerous letters sent to Arkansas over the course of the first year of integration are a form of resistance. Instead of protesting for months, segregationists wrote in and articulated their feelings about integration continuing to plague southern society. The 1957-1958 school year wrapped up that spring and the summer provided an opportunity to regroup and reorganize.

¹⁵⁷ Sokol, *There Goes My Everything*, 101-102.

¹⁵⁸ Goldfield, *Black, White, and Southern*, 76.

Section Three: The Lost Year

On May 27, 1958, Central High School graduated its first black student, Ernest Green, and launched into a second wave of political crisis. Green's graduation was a monumental moment in African American history and proved that integration had happened. However, the white population felt otherwise. Summer allowed a reevaluation of the segregationist approach to integration. The community felt exhausted by the past school year and needed to find a way to calm the city down. It appeared the school system could only take so much change at one time. Did gradualism make sense? Blossom certainly had a change of heart.

Blossom and the School Board wasted little time before filing to delay integration in response to the past nine months. By evaluating the evidence previously discussed, citizens across the state continued to grow angry and upset about Little Rock's decision to move forward with integration. Blossom was well aware of these feelings and did not see the system withstanding another year of integration, "The school board's token plan for desegregation, its sought-for delay, and its failure to respond assertively to student and outside resistance now exposed its own ambivalence about pursuing meaningful integration."¹⁵⁹ Politically, Faubus aligned himself with the segregationists to ensure his reelection. Looking back on the first year of integration, the white community could not ignore the fact Central High enrolled black students and even graduated Green. However, the fight for segregation was far from over. This next year meant a second opportunity.

In June, Virgil Blossom and the Little Rock School Board requested Judge Harry J. Lemley delay integration for roughly thirty months. The board agreed earlier that Spring this

¹⁵⁹ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 19

was best and “to stress the difficulty of carrying on a program of education in a climate of extreme vocal public resistance,” even if it was the plan they personally designed.¹⁶⁰

Blossom and his attorneys aimed to describe the hardships Central faced over the past year and why. Teachers testified to the declining educational program at Central and spoke to the persistent hostile environment within the school. Blossom and his peers believed Little Rock’s rejection of segregation created a difficult atmosphere for their original plan of action to succeed much longer.¹⁶¹ Blossom’s request was granted on June 21, 1958. To him, the state was in no position to continue pushing towards complete integration, even after one year of mixed classrooms. In his personal testimony, Blossom recalled cases of harassment, mob violence, and other moments of safety concern while also commenting on Faubus’ unsupportive actions. This delay would put his plans on pause, but felt necessary in order for progress in the future.

Shortly after Judge Lemley’s decision, Governor Faubus and his supporters began campaigning for reelection and swiftly won him a third term. Before his official victory, Blossom and the School Board seized the opportunity to speak out publically against Faubus’ campaign. Blossom released statements made to the FBI from September of 1957 contradictory to how Faubus now told “all the essential points of his version.”¹⁶² His campaign for reelection was timely as white segregationists felt pleased with his attitude towards Blossom. Once the delayed start date for Central was appealed by the NAACP, Faubus began working on his plan to prevent any further progress. He called the Arkansas General Assembly and offered them a six-bill package.

¹⁶⁰ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 11.

¹⁶¹ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 13.

¹⁶² Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 20.

The Arkansas General Assembly heard Faubus speak shortly after his propositions. Faubus intended to play upon the public fear and scare the assembly into considering his bills. The state feared desegregation and continuing to envision race mixing and the wrath of God. Faubus' bills covered a variety of different areas. One bill planned to withhold state funding to public schools on a per-pupil basis redirected to a private school if they chose to transfer. Another bill declared no student could be denied enrollment at a public school based on their refusal to attend classes with students of another race. Other proposed measures appropriated roughly \$100,000 of funds for the governor's use "in regulating the administration and financing the public schools."¹⁶³ Faubus had big plans for the coming months and set up his authority in the Arkansas General Assembly as a safety plan before the Supreme Court's final decision.

In Washington, D.C., the lawyers prepared for a heated trial to determine the fate of Arkansian integration. As top men in their fields, Thurgood Marshall represented the NAACP while Richard C. Butler represented the Little Rock School Board. The Supreme Court took Little Rock's case the last week of August. Schools planned to open on September 8, 1958. Little Rock resumed a familiar position awaiting the court's decision whether integration would move forward. After considering the NAACP and School Board's arguments, the justices delivered their opinion within two weeks of opening the case. They ruled unanimously, announcing, "all high schools would open on Monday, September 15, and that Central High would again be integrated."¹⁶⁴

Once again, the Supreme Court failed to align with white southern segregationists and further isolated the South from the federal government. Faubus acted immediately. He signed

¹⁶³ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 29

¹⁶⁴ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 31.

fifteen of his bills into law and alerted the state that all public schools would be closed on his authority as governor. Act 4 allowed Faubus to issue a referendum for October 7, allowing district voters to approve or disapprove his actions.¹⁶⁵ Schools set to open September 27, however, Faubus restored the Central High football practices by personal request.

The Central High football team was symbolic of southern white tradition prevailing during a time of digression. Faubus reinstated the football team after cancelling school because football “was as much a way of life in the Southeast as was segregation, and many of Faubus’ financial supporters thrived on the sport.”¹⁶⁶ Tradition and football reminded the white community of a happier, segregated past. Other teams were not permitted to resume practicing. Football was unique. Faubus wanted to send a message to the state that he honored his white constituents and their desire to return to their former society. A couple weeks later, high school classes for all four public schools appeared on early morning television.

For segregationists, white children deserved to learn in segregated classrooms. Shutting down the public schools entirely suggested if white children could not learn in all-white classrooms, then no child would learn in classrooms at all. Teachers scrambled to find employment and Faubus quietly blamed the School Board for any unforeseen issues. A few teachers resumed teaching on television a couple hours a day. They taught only basic lesson plans on the major subjects, including English, history, science, and mathematics.¹⁶⁷ Locally broadcasted lessons were available to all children in the area. This resulted in a racially mixed audience. One white history teacher aired from seven thirty to eight in the morning

¹⁶⁵ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 31

¹⁶⁶ Perry and Perry, *The Little Rock Crisis*, 91.

¹⁶⁷ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 39.

and delivered such stimulating lessons that she stayed to teach on television for the remainder of the year.¹⁶⁸

Historian Sondra Gordy refers to this year as the “Lost Year.” Faubus’ actions shut down public schools completely and set students back. Gordy defines this year as more than an inconvenience, “Both race and class brought disproportionate suffering to displaced black and some poor white students. Public schools lost support in the segregationist community. Public school teachers lost their civil liberties at the hands of the legislature and the governor.”¹⁶⁹ Many students lost touch with friends and the community because they became completely disconnected. In Gordy’s perspective, this year is brushed aside by historians as a mere “footnote to the media-drenched Little Rock desegregation crisis,” forgetting the Lost Year’s importance. This year was the result of Arkansas’ failure to transition into an integrated society with the rest of the nation. Gordy points out how detrimental this failure is to the futures of many Little Rock high school students who essentially suffered through 1958 and 1959. In her conclusion to *Finding the Lost Year*, she includes quotes from high school students trying to explain the devastating effects of their state government’s choices,

Gordy interviewed P. H. Gilkey, Edie Garland, Shirley Collier Stephens, Faye Perry, and John Taylor to try and explain some of these effects firsthand. Gilkey, a black junior, never reenrolled at his former high school and turned to the military for support. Stephens and Perry, from Horace Mann High School, felt betrayed by their community. In her interview, Stephens explained her feelings by stating, “I lost everything, I lost friends. I lost my home and my family for a time. I lost my community. It wasn’t just about school, I lost

¹⁶⁸ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 40.

¹⁶⁹ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 175.

everything.”¹⁷⁰ Garland and Taylor left the state entirely. These stories speak to the uprooting of many students and a disregard for their education. Gordy’s work attempts to bring attention to the Lost Year and Faubus’ irresponsible actions. Her writing provides insight into Arkansas’ second wave of chaos to the public-school system.

During the Lost Year, the Mother’s League resurfaced and adapted their message from extracting black students out of Central High to a state’s right campaign. After Faubus shut down the public schools, the League could no longer physically protest outside the school. Now, the white resistance redirected their focus towards the growing “federal dictatorship,” in Washington.¹⁷¹ After Governor Faubus reacted to the Supreme Court’s decision, the League gathered signatures to remove members of the School Board in favor of integration. The president of the League, Margaret Jackson, spoke to the press, stating, “The people of Little Rock have said again they do not want integration in their schools. We feel that the Supreme Court should listen to the voice of the people of Little Rock.”¹⁷² One year later, the mothers resumed their position in the battle against desegregation.

The Lost Year symbolized a moment in history when education failed to support the nation’s children and southern segregationists prevailed. Faubus won reelection, white organization regained their footing, and black students did not attend previously integrated schools. To the resistance, this year was a temporary victory. However, the schools could not stay closed indefinitely and once they reopened, integration would return. Faubus and his supporters shut down schools to stall the process, but were unable to articulate why. Society

¹⁷⁰ Gordy, *Finding the Lost Year*, 176.

¹⁷¹ Graeme Cope, “‘The workingest, fightingest, band of patriots in the south’? The Mothers’ League of Central High School during the Lost Year, 1958-1959,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 72 (2013): 139-157. Here 141.

¹⁷² Cope, “‘The workingest, fightingest, band of patriots in the south’,” 146.

transitioned from a segregated system to an integrated system to the absence of a system. Could this be considered a true victory? What was the ultimate goal? The North accepted the Supreme Court's decision and a few surrounding southern states slowly submitted, such as Tennessee and North Carolina. In the fall of 1957, Arkansas occupied the nation's attention and after a few months the world lost interest. Legally, Arkansas would not win. It was only a matter of time before the pro-segregationist argument faded into submission along with the rest of the nation. However, these two years pushed back the nation's agenda to integrate.

Conclusion

A year and a half passed as the threat of integration loomed over Arkansas. Little Rock survived a year of integration, proving to the nation it was possible. Ernest Green graduated and the state witnessed whites and blacks attending school together. Race mixing and the possibility of intimacy between young people remained a concern for many whites throughout the South, but the white race did not cease to exist after Central High School integrated. To white southerners, the legal system and federal government developed into a government unrepresentative of their fundamental beliefs. The white people of Arkansas no longer trusted the federal government and put their faith in local governments and God. The southern white understanding of America underwent a transition, but they remained steadfast in preventing any further progress. After one year of integration, Little Rock prevented the schools from opening for a second year of integration. The capitol experienced two years of discomfort with such irregularity within the public-school system. The score was tied.

Those on the far right of the Southern reactions spectrum would inevitably fade as the nation grew accustomed to *Brown*. The neutral southerners who kept clam under the distress and chaotic environment that became the South came out unscathed. The Southern moderates

continued to implement different discriminatory practices, but through legal and economic alternatives instead of physical resistance. Every southerner shared a common history and felt connected to a southern way of life. How people chose to preserve this lifestyle varied. This chapter argues those who wanted to physical resist segregation and continue to publically resist lost momentum during the first year of integration, but regained it over the summer. Little Rock completed one year of integration and demonstrated that society could survive.

Conclusion

The legacies of *Brown v. Board of Education* show a continuous battle to desegregate schools long after the initial ruling in 1954. Southern segregationists continued to desire a segregated system to protect the “southern way of life.” They searched for alternative ways to preserve the racial and social hierarchies well after the Little Rock Crisis of 1957. Private academies sprang up all over the South in the 1960s and flourished as all-white institutions.¹⁷³ Turning to private schools gave pro-segregationists the opportunity to resist *Brown* through socioeconomic class advantages. In addition to private schools, individual communities across the South promoted de facto racial segregation, cited in multiple court cases through the late twentieth century.¹⁷⁴ Judge Robert L. Carter notes the abuse of legislatures in order to reenact these racially segregated systems as recently as 2007. The legacies of *Brown* mentioned here are continuations of southern hostilities and the unwillingness to let go of the “southern way of life.” According to Carter, it is up to the new generation of Americans to ensure *Brown* becomes an actual reality for the children who still receive inferior educations.¹⁷⁵

Looking closely at private schools since 1960, the South has grown in attendance compared to the rest of the country. This fact can be attributed to school desegregation offering white families an alternative to exposing their children to mixed race schools. Charles T. Clotfelter, a professor of public policy at Duke University, argues southern states use private schools to segregate white children from minority students without breaking the

¹⁷³ Charles T. Clotfelter, "Private Schools, Segregation, and the Southern States," *Peabody Journal of Education* 79, no. 2 (2004): 74-97. Here 77.

¹⁷⁴ Robert L. Carter, "Brown's Legacy: Fulfilling the Promise of Equal Education," *The Journal of Negro Education* 76, no. 3 (2007): 240-49. Here 247.

¹⁷⁵ Carter, "Brown's Legacy," 248.

law. Rising affluence in the South from *Brown* to the present day supports Clotfelter's evidence of access to private schools for white families. Through extensive data collection and careful empirical analysis, Clotfelter concluded that private academies and their high enrollment of white students have a role in the racial segregation in the South today.¹⁷⁶

Until roughly 1971, lower courts issued desegregation orders with little direction or guidance from the Supreme Court. Before *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, this failure made it incredibly difficult for lower courts to rule on these cases, especially involving "freedom-of-choice" plans.¹⁷⁷ Choice plans allowed blacks to go to white schools, or transfer, and whites to go to black schools.¹⁷⁸ In *Swann*, the Supreme Court struck down the school district's plan for integration and ruled that school districts could not exclude pupils on account of race. A couple years before, in 1968, *Green v. New Kent County School Board* determined seven factors that states must follow in order to comply with desegregation. Located in Virginia, this case of "Green factors" helped further define *Brown*. The factors include,

“(a) students of all races receive the same quality education, (b) administrator and teacher assignments be race neutral, (c) student assignments be race neutral, (d) all students be given equal access to the school transportation system, (e) all schools receive equitable allocations of resources, (f) school buildings and facilities be of equal quality, and (g) all students be given equal access to extracurricular activities.”¹⁷⁹

These two cases helped pave the way for future desegregation cases, such as *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* and *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education*, both brought to the Court in 2007. Argued in 1991, *Board of*

¹⁷⁶ Clotfelter, "Private Schools, Segregation, and the Southern States," 90.

¹⁷⁷ Philip T. K. Daniel, "Accountability and Desegregation: Brown and Its Legacy," *The Journal of Negro Education* 73, no. 3 (2004): 255-67. Here 262.

¹⁷⁸ Daniel, "Accountability and Desegregation," 262.

¹⁷⁹ Daniel, "Accountability and Desegregation," 262.

Education v. Dowell adopted a School Reassignment Plan originally presented in 1984, “which effectively returned many previously desegregated schools to one-race schools.”¹⁸⁰

These cases continue to encourage federal court intervention on the state and local levels.

The impact of these new obstacles for *Brown* as well as the alternative forms of segregation work to build this legacy. George W. Bush’s No Child Left Behind Act in 2002 and the many charter schools opened across the nation as a result of this Act promote public school education supported by federal government funds.¹⁸¹ These efforts acknowledge the extreme inequality within the American public education system driven by socioeconomic class and school districts. After private schools and charter schools picked up admission, the federal government could no longer regulate education to the same degree as before. There were options available out of reach.

My research and this project aim to uncover and understand the Southern segregationist reaction to *Brown v. Board of Education* to determine how and why this segregationist movement began leading up to recent history. Nine African American students integrated their local public high school after given the legal right to do so by *Brown v. Board of Education*. White men in control of southern cities and states were challenged by the federal government, including Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus, and visually exposed the nation’s deep-rooted tensions between races. The whole country felt the changes taking place in schools, government, and daily life. The white segregationist residents of Little Rock, Arkansas and their allies across the South responded to the desegregation of Central High School aggressively and without fail. This one reaction, not the only one that occurred, spoke louder and longer than the others. The segregationists did not necessarily outnumber

¹⁸⁰ Daniel, "Accountability and Desegregation," 264.

¹⁸¹ Daniel, "Accountability and Desegregation," 260-261.

the moderates and antiracists, but they mobilized and circulated propaganda to ensure support. They worked tirelessly to protect their racial hierarchy. The journey to this point began with *Brown*.

The first chapter of this project provided an overview of key cases before *Brown*, information about the Warren Court and the legal atmosphere in which the case was decided, and a spectrum of Southern reactions. The journey from *Plessy* to *Brown* lasted over fifty-five years and contributed to maintaining a racial hierarchy across the nation. However, the separate-but-equal doctrine felt particularly engrained in the southern way of life. Systematic discrimination and segregation kept blacks and whites The Warren Court recognized differences between reactions from the North and the South in terms of racial laws based on their reactions in the past. The South carries a history of KKK violence and an economy driven by slave labor. This chapter takes into consideration the South's historical reaction to race relations and discusses a spectrum of Southern reactions to *Brown*. Their reactions are logical. After the Civil War, Southern whites established a racial hierarchy that survived and thrived until *Brown*. The segregationists chose to overtly react with violence, organization and aggression as opposed to Southern moderates and anti-racists. By analyzing the journey from *Plessy* to *Brown* and how the Supreme Court handled their decision to overturn this precedent, this project suggests the South produced an understandable reaction.

Chapter one narrows in on Little Rock, Arkansas as a case study of the Southern segregationist reaction through the political and administrative positions held by Governor Faubus and Superintendent Blossom. Their decisions from 1954, after the decision was released, up until 1957, demonstrate the lack of organization and public support for the federal government. Arkansas stood alone among the other Southern states as an example of

the segregationist violent reaction to *Brown*. They proved how far the segregationist movement was willing to go and on public television. The white mob fought hard to protest integration and made the entire experience real for the nation. They could see the far right of the spectrum. This mob would fight for months in order to preserve their racial hierarchy and prevent race mixing.

Throughout this chapter, the historical narrative suggests the South would have a response similar to the one that many did. This abrupt transition for the public-school system could be politically redefined, but not socially uprooted. The legality of the matter was only a first step. This chapter explains that once *Brown* was in the Supreme Court, which was not completely unimaginable based on previous cases, segregationists saw their legal upper hand slipping away. The racial hierarchy protected this upper hand and now the Supreme Court slowly chipped away segregated schools, which ensured safety from race-mixing and the African American community to a reasonable extent. It was only a matter of time before a Southern city erupted with segregationist propaganda and mob violence against *Brown*. Little Rock was the chosen city.

Chapter two brings the Southern reaction to life by explaining the steps white organizations took to combat integration and how the first month of school progressed. This chapter provides evidence of the anger many southerners felt towards the federal government and Faubus' lack of support for segregation. Arkansas was a representative of the South to the rest of the nation and it was important for the segregation agenda to shine through.

White southerners saw an opportunity to express their grievances and publically resist school integration through organized and individual acts of violence, aggressive public policies, and rhetoric. White students inside Central High School acting on their own beliefs

as well as the beliefs of their parents went out of their way to push, spit, and terrorize the Little Rock Nine. The evidence examined in this chapter discusses the WCC and Mother's League actions to ensure segregation. They were unable to succeed in stopping integration entirely, but they did keep the segregationist message alive for the rest of the year.

Chapter three continues to tell the story of Central High School, but focuses on the first completed year of integration. The students survived just as the community did. However, the segregationists regrouped and the Governor won reelection. These two forces combined pushed Arkansas back into the spotlight when all education in Little Rock shut down. School closed for the next year. This decision is a direct result of the way the community felt about integration. The year of integration and the segregationists who kept writing and kept circulating pamphlets finally reached a point where the people of Little Rock couldn't think about integration anymore. Blossom agreed, the city had enough. Could gradualism have worked any better? No. There would be no correct time to transition society from segregation to integration because the racial hierarchy was at stake.

The threat of race mixing and Christianity scared segregationists and many other Southerners into believing segregation was evil and dangerous. Men and women writing in to express their concerns and threaten Blossom invested their time and energy into stopping any further integration. Even after one year, the fight was not over. Without children attending schools, the Lost Year transformed the public education system in Little Rock. People saw schools empty because of *Brown*. The Supreme Court decision continued to haunt the city four years later. Race mixing was no longer a problem because students learned segregated in their living rooms, but the problem could not be postponed forever.

Analyzing the white southern response to African Americans at this time exposes the many dangerous ideologies and practices supported since the 1800s when the South was committed to a slave society. At this time, they appeared through different organization such as the Mother's League and Capital Citizen's Council. Little Rock provides a location and event in which to closely evaluate and study the white southern response to desegregation and the various attempts to prevent used to stunt America's progress. Central High School is an example of the complicated feelings and approaches white citizens from a moderate, Arkansas city took to combat national changes. White southerners are watched by the rest of the nation during this intrinsic time of transformation in the United States. Central High School provides a lens in which to analyze the white population organizing resistance to the Civil Rights Movement before the 1960s. The nation watched white southerners during this complicated time of transformation from segregation to integration in the United States. Witnessing KKK issued threats, public support for white resistance by politicians, and physical violence between citizens of the same town showed the rest of the nation how difficult the journey to integration would prove to be. There was a true divide among the population.

We can never truly know what went through the minds of southerners present during this time. They feared catastrophic change and wanted to be seen for their regional values. This scholarship and the abundance of primary source material tries to piece together a story about Little Rock in a time of drastic change. The segregationist perspective tells a unique, intense story that is important to remember when we think about the South today. The Little Rock crisis is a part of Arkansian history as well as American history. The reactions Southerners felt towards *Brown* are not dissimilar to the North, but they experienced them

with a different regional, political, and social history in mind. Segregationists fought hard against what they believed would benefit their race and country, but failed to see that the law stands until it is overturned.

The road from *Plessy* to *Brown*, and to the present day, shows a long journey from legal segregation to de facto segregation. There is inequality in America rooted in more than simply the educational system. *Brown* was able to expose the southern segregationist sentiments in the 1950s, but was unable to completely overturn a racial hierarchy supported by political, social, and economic power. This journey is not over and segregated communities will continue to survive as long as inequality thrives in American society. Schools are representative of the younger generations taught how this society works and are innocent, impressionable groups. Schools are sacred spaces. In the future, Americans will protect the educational system, but hopefully this time it will be for equal education and against the inequality seen in Little Rock in 1957.

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