

SETTLING DOWN FOR THE LONG HAUL: THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT  
IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA, 1945-1995

by

JAMES BOWERS WALL

(Under the Direction of Cindy Hahamovitch)

ABSTRACT

“Settling Down for the Long Haul” examines black freedom and white resistance movements in the Black Belt of Southwest Georgia over the course of several decades. The study centers on Albany, one of the most important yet under-examined battlegrounds of the modern African American civil rights movement. By investigating the prolonged and varied campaigns for racial equality before and after the brief involvement of Martin Luther King, Jr., the project sheds new light on how grassroots movements are formed—and persist—after their supposed “climax” has passed.

INDEX WORDS: Civil Rights Movement, African American, Southwest Georgia, Albany, Albany Movement, Long Civil Rights Movement, War on Poverty, Agricultural Cooperatives, Disaster Relief, Flint River Flood, Labor History, Community Studies

SETTLING DOWN FOR THE LONG HAUL: THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT  
IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA, 1945-1995

by

JAMES BOWERS WALL

B.A., University of North Texas, 2008

M.A., University of Houston, 2011

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2018



SETTLING DOWN FOR THE LONG HAUL: THE BLACK FREEDOM MOVEMENT  
IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA, 1945-1995

by

JAMES BOWERS WALL

Major Professor:	Cindy Hahamovitch
Committee:	James C. Cobb
	John Inscoe
	J. Todd Moya

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour  
Dean of the Graduate School  
The University of Georgia  
August 2018

*To Mom and Dad*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Seeing as I'm supposedly a real historian now, and this is in fact a work of history, it's only appropriate that I present my acknowledgements in chronological fashion. From the beginning, my mother and father have been there, in every conceivable way. To my mother I owe an immense debt of gratitude for transferring her love of history to me. There is no one better in an archive than Mary Wall, and throughout the course of this project she served as an unpaid research assistant, helping transcribe interviews, scan microfilm, and dive through reams of old documents with me at libraries across the country. More than that though, she's been a devoted friend along this journey, and I'm forever grateful to her for modeling a strength and courage I can't come close to emulating. To my father I owe a boatload of money that will never be repaid (sorry Dad). From him I also borrowed a sense of humor and a way of looking at the world that equipped me to weather the storms of graduate school.

My sister EJ is crazy, in a good way. Throughout our lives, and especially over the better part of the last decade (it could be safely said that I've taken the scenic route through graduate school), she has always picked up the phone, always called, always been ready with a well-placed movie quote or off-the-wall story. My brother Joseph is a devoted family man, always supporting each member of our haphazard clan with a quiet dignity that inspires me. My Aunt Rita is one of the most loving people I've ever met, and from time to time when I feel the weight of the world pressing down upon me, I look at my phone to see a loving text message from her. I have been lucky to have a family

that—while certainly eclectic—will always be there for me. We are odd, but strong, and I couldn't have done it without you guys.

I have fewer friends than most, but in terms of quality, they can't be beat. James Emerson tops the bill. His unique perspective on the world, his creative talent, and his willingness to poke through the minutiae of everyday life by refusing to take anything seriously has yielded a treasure trove of friendship that cannot be quantified. Mary Poe—the erudite, literary, and hilarious member of my undergraduate cohort and lifelong “Bear”—I thank you for all the porch time, all the singalongs, all the Camel Crushes.

Throughout graduate school I've been sustained by a revolving door of good friends that helped me laugh my way through the highs, lows, and middles of academia. I would not have made it through my time in Houston without the welcome company of Ben and Courtney Pugno. Throughout my time in Athens, I've met an amazing cast of characters that have brightened my life. Ashley Roseberry, who is one of the most intelligent and sharp-witted intellectuals I've ever met, always had my back and kept me sane many a time through grad school. Alex Nordlund never said no to an afternoon beer, and for that he's one of the best friends I've had at UGA. Alex and Allie LoPilato always put up with me and were there to provide a couch and/or bed to sleep on during Atlanta research trips. Jacob Martin was always ready to play chess, talk NBA, or just sit at a bar and discuss life. Dillon Carroll can always make me laugh—always—and I'll forever cherish our time in Athens and our research trips together. Michele Johnson is one of the most devoted and caring people I've ever met, and she has been an enduring and supportive presence in my life over the past few years of school. Ashton Ellett has been a fantastic mentor and friend since day one at UGA, and his political wonkery is equaled

by no one. Kurt Windisch is just one goofy bastard, but his infectious zest for life and our shared love for Seinfeld has always brought a smile to my face. There are too many names to mention, and I know I will forget some, but I must extend the same gratitude to Ben Smith, Kathryn Veale, James Owen, Jon Emerson, Gilberto Navarro, Andrew and Katie Fialka, Bryant Barnes, Kate Dahlstrand, Cutter Lindbergh (and all the members of the Pound Hall basketball crew), Trae Welborn, Robby Poister, and Whitney Priest for making my life better.

As for the faculty and staff of the UGA History Department, I could not have asked for a better group of people to work with. Laurie Kane, though constantly infuriated by my complete inability to meet deadlines, has nevertheless forgiven me each time and helped me navigate the circuitous bureaucratic channels of grad school, all while making me laugh and letting me sound off on practically anything. I will miss our hallway stop n' chats. The same goes for Cilla Cartwright, who made me chuckle every time I went down to bother her in the main office (and I bothered her a lot). Robert Pratt took a chance on an unproven young historian from the University of Houston and shepherded my application through the appropriate channels. Seeing as UGA was the only doctoral program that accepted me, I can safely say his support changed my life. In my early years at UGA, I was fortunate to learn from an amazing group of historians. Professors like Stephen Mihm, Stephen Berry, Shane Hamilton, Reinaldo Román, Dan Rood, Brian Drake, and Tim Cleaveland are what make the art of history enjoyable, and I thank them all for their perspective and tutelage. And then there's the boss: Cindy Hahamovitch. When I sheepishly approached her asking if she'd read a chapter from my dissertation, she immediately agreed. Now she's my major advisor, and I can safely say



that without her I would not have made it to the end of this long journey. She is one of the most supportive, most productive, most intelligent, and most devoted mentors I've ever seen, and I'm lucky to have her in my corner. Thank you Cindy, for always answering my emails as I'm typing them, and for reading my chapters before I'm done writing them. The rest of my committee is a veritable group of all stars. For my money, Jim Cobb is the undisputed dean of southern history, and I'm honored to have worked in his shadow over the last several years. John Inscoe is without question the nicest person I've ever met, and has always greeted me at his office with a smile and an encouraging word.

Outside of UGA, there's a small group of individuals who were truly essential in bringing this project to fruition. I would never have known about Albany had Todd Moye, my undergraduate mentor at the University of North Texas (and outside reader on this project), not suggested I look into it. After he did so I called Lee Formwalt, then-head of the Albany Civil Rights Institute. We talked for two hours about the history of this troubled region, and he invited me to southwest Georgia where he introduced me to activists, showed me new sources, and was a guiding light throughout the research process. He is one of the most giving people I've met in my academic tenure, and without him this dissertation would never have seen the light of day. But most crucial to this project were the people of Albany, who shared their lives with me and taught me what real struggle looks like. I hope my small contribution here can help illuminate their stories to a broader audience.

And finally, in the interest of saving the best for last, there is Allie Venrick, my partner through the last year and my person, whose love and devotion gives me life and

keeps me going during the most stressful of times. History is often written as a series of accidents—coincidences that turn on the slightest of individual decisions and flimsy circumstances. For me, my most important history took the form of a series of messages sent just before taking off on a plane out of Texas on Thanksgiving Break. That exchange has taken us to the arid middle of nowhere, the verdant coastal edge of America, and soon toward an endless horizon of possibilities I can't wait to experience. As much as I enjoyed writing this dissertation, I am more excited about the beautiful life we're writing together.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER	
1 “YOU CAN’T BUILD A CHIMNEY FROM THE TOP”: THE JIM CROW GENERATION IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA.....	28
2 “EQUALITY IS A WORD YOU JUST DON’T USE”: THE BREWING OF THE ALBANY MOVEMENT.....	56
3 “DO YOU WANT TO BE FREE?”: THE CLASSICAL PHASE OF THE ALBANY MOVEMENT .....	93
4 “STILL WATER THAT RUNS DEEP”: THE ALBANY MOVEMENT AFTER KING .....	136
5 “THE MAN WHO OWNS THE LAND OWNS YOU”: THE RISE AND FALL OF NEW COMMUNITIES INCORPORATED .....	178
6 “UNTIL HELL FREEZES OVER”: JOHNSON V. CITY OF ALBANY AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUAL EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA.....	222
7 “LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN LIKE WATER”: THE FLINT RIVER FLOOD OF 1994 AND THE STRUGGLE TO REBUILD SOUTHWEST GEORGIA.....	255
REFERENCES.....	312

## INTRODUCTION

On the morning of July 12, 1962, Martin Luther King Jr. emerged from the city jail in Albany, Georgia, bailed out against his will by an unknown benefactor. Confused by this unexpected turn of events, King and his lieutenants tried in vain to breathe fresh life into the ongoing local movement to destroy segregation in the small Black Belt city. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) soon pulled up stakes and left town. As the story is commonly told, despite SCLC's retreat, the seeds of victory for Birmingham were planted in Albany.

"Settling Down for the Long Haul" explains what happened *before* and *after* Martin Luther King, Jr.'s involvement in the Albany Movement. It does so by taking an deep look at the long history of the struggle to tear down Jim Crow in Albany, Georgia. Although a town of just 50,000 people, Albany became home to the first citywide desegregation campaign of the modern African American civil rights era. But in the decades following the tumultuous direct-action struggle to integrate southwest Georgia in the early 1960s, Albany receded into the background of the civil rights narrative, supplanted by tales of heroic victories in Alabama and Mississippi. The Albany Movement—if mentioned at all—became known as a learning experience for King and SCLC.

The arrival of the civil rights icon in December 1961 elevated the previously local struggle into the national consciousness. But King soon proved to be out of his depth, and his presence, while bringing intense media scrutiny, also destabilized the somewhat

fragile alliance between older middle-class professionals and younger, more aggressive leaders. The shaky coalition struggled to present a united front in the face of shrewd opposition from local police. Unlike later campaigns in Alabama, mass protests in Albany did not bring dogs, blackjacks, and fire hoses, only mass arrests, conducted (for the most part) peacefully by officers under strict orders from Police Chief Laurie Pritchett not to harm anyone.

The spotlight on Albany faded after King's retreat to Atlanta in July 1962, and elicited much hand-wringing and armchair-quarterbacking to determine what had gone wrong. Early accounts of the Albany Movement featured a stock conclusion—King and local movement leaders had demanded too much, planned too little, and underestimated the ability of whites to wage a war of attrition. The failure in Albany, so the story goes, taught King that he would have to choose his battlegrounds more carefully, being sure to pick cities with more rabid, temperamental, and less disciplined police officers like Bull Connor in Birmingham and Jim Clark in Selma.

But the story of Martin Luther King, Jr. is not the story of the black freedom movement in Southwest Georgia. Through an extensive examination of the region's troubled history of race relations, "Settling Down for the Long Haul" highlights the diverse array of African-American campaigns for social justice and human rights in the Georgia Black Belt. The struggle for racial equality in Southwest Georgia came in waves, and progressed in fits and starts over the course of the twentieth century. Movement leaders fought often over which objectives to pursue, what protest tactics to use, and which organization represented the true will of the black community.

By tracing the contours of these struggles, I argue that underneath all the infighting and drama, the movement was fueled not by the agenda of national civil rights organizations, but by the grassroots movement culture of the local black community. Placing King at the center of the Albany narrative assigns a false criteria for success that dissolves a long-term movement with diverse goals and tactics into a brief direct-action struggle considered a failure for not completely desegregating an entire city in a matter of months. But for those who take the ideas and goals of local movements seriously and stretch the chronology of the black freedom struggle in Southwest Georgia beyond King's 1962 departure, the story becomes one of long-term successes and lingering frustrations.

With few exceptions, historians have viewed the racial struggles of southwest Georgia through the lens of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s brief involvement as an outside advisor to the "Albany Movement." In many ways, the historiographical debates over Albany mirror those of the larger civil rights struggle. Particularly in the world of community studies, civil rights scholars have spilled a considerable amount of ink trying to answer two major questions—Why is this community an important success or failure in the larger scope of the movement? And, what constitutes "success" or "failure" in a particular locality?

Defining success and failure in the protest movements of the civil rights era all depends on framing. Southwest Georgia, perhaps more than any other region examined by contemporary historians, has been branded as one of the major failed campaigns of the movement. Early observers looked at Albany through the prism of Martin Luther King. In this portrayal, King's arrival in December 1961 galvanized a stalemated movement,

and his subsequent departure one year later signaled the protracted demise of the once-promising struggle.

The “King-centric” interpretation dominated the historiography of the Albany Movement because most early treatments of the subject came as chapters in King biographies. David Levering Lewis, David J. Garrow, and Taylor Branch<sup>1</sup> made the natural choice to bookend their investigations of the Albany campaign with King’s departure. And though these historians provided exhaustive accounts of the myriad strategies, dynamics, and rivalries that defined the direct-action campaigns of 1961-62, their accounts generally concluded that the Albany Movement—while important as a training ground for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and an instruction manual for what *not* to do in Birmingham and Selma—was nevertheless, a failure.

King’s biographers had good reasons for criticizing the Albany Movement. The direct-action phase of the Albany struggle was a mess. Unlike the Montgomery Bus Boycotts of 1955 that narrowly targeted the public transit system, the Albany Movement called for the desegregation of all public and municipal facilities, equal employment opportunity, and an end to police brutality. Although 1960 had brought waves of sit-ins, boycotts, and marches, most protest campaigns remained flashpoints rather than organized crusades. Albany led the Deep South into the civil rights movement by taking

---

<sup>1</sup> David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York, W. Morrow, 1986), Chapter 4; David Levering Lewis, *King: A Critical Biography* (Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1971), Chapter 6; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1988), Chapters 14 & 16.

the next logical step forward—mounting a citywide, inter-organizational effort to destroy all vestiges of Jim Crow.

Taking such a bold step forward meant black leaders would face a mammoth struggle not only against recalcitrant politicians and business owners, but also within their own camp, as they struggled to close ranks and speak with a united voice. The black community split along generational, organizational, philosophical, and class lines. While many local residents were taken in by King's fame and charm, others found him pompous, arrogant—an outsider coming in to take credit for victories that sprang from a grassroots movement culture spanning back decades. When SNCC and NAACP leaders were not criticizing King, they were fighting each other, jostling for control of the newborn coordinating body—the self-titled “Albany Movement”—before it even had a chance to settle on a course of action. When the dust settled after SCLC pulled up stakes in late 1962, there remained an intransigent city commission more determined than ever to ignore the demands of the black community. Looking back, many historians have used SCLC's departure as a tombstone for the movement. They have argued—rightly so—that a lethal combination of unrealistic goals, factionalism, and haphazard organization exhausted the Albany Movement.

Beyond the movement's internal dissent, many historians have centered on the complicated figure of Laurie Pritchett to frame their narratives. Pritchett, the Albany Police Chief, strikes a marked contrast when compared to the Bull Connors and Jim Clarks of the civil rights movement. While Pritchett did not completely succeed in preventing violence, he certainly earned his reputation as one of the most shrewd and formidable members of the law enforcement community during the civil rights era. He



did so by holding his subordinates in line while contracting with nearby counties for jail space, where he would imprison nearly 1500 protestors throughout the course of the movement. Historian J. Todd Moya has characterized Pritchett's tactics as "nonviolent jujitsu"<sup>2</sup>—a term that captures the shrewd methods the police chief employed to portray himself as a racial moderate committed to preserving law and order. David L. Chappell echoed a similar line, characterizing Pritchett's tactics as "nonviolent," concluding that unlike other southern campaigns that had gained "at least some kind of token victory," Albany had "lost a big one to the segregationists."<sup>3</sup>

Though initial treatments of Albany privileged King's role, the mid-to-late 1980s brought forth a handful of journal articles<sup>4</sup> and book chapters that dissected the organizational dynamics of the movement. In his seminal study of the SCLC, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, Adam Fairclough does little to depart from his predecessors, arguing that "Albany taught SCLC how to mobilize black southerners. Although it made grievous errors and finally had to withdraw in defeat, SCLC learned vital lessons and matured as an organization." Fairclough argues, along with many others, that King went to Albany

---

<sup>2</sup> J. Todd Moya, "Focusing Our Eyes on the Prize: How Community Studies Are Reframing and Rewriting the History of the Civil Rights Movement," in *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement*, ed. Emilye Crosby (University of Georgia Press, 2011), 157.

<sup>3</sup> David L. Chappell, *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Both articles generally follow the "classical phase" of the movement and draw similar conclusions to previous treatments. See Stephen B. Oates, "The Albany Movement: A Chapter in the Life of Martin Luther King, Jr." *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 2 (Fall 1984): 26-39; Ricks, John A., III. "'De Lawd' Descends and Is Crucified: Martin Luther King Jr. in Albany, Georgia." *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 2 (Fall 1984): 3-14.

without adequate planning and preparation.<sup>5</sup> Fairclough dissects the inner workings of the movement, arguing that its organizational structure, lacking a clear chain of command, put the movement at a disadvantage from the outset.

Throughout the movement, tensions ran high between SNCC, CORE, NAACP, and SCLC, who all attempted to gain control of the umbrella “Albany Movement” organization. Fairclough emphasizes the fractious relationship between these organizations, devoting particular emphasis to the fight between NAACP and SNCC. According to Fairclough, “the NAACP regarded the coming of SNCC with horror.”<sup>6</sup> After failing to revive Albany’s local NAACP branch, Georgia field secretary Vernon Jordan did everything in his power to withhold aid from the newly formed and SNCC-controlled Albany Movement organization. He agrees with Chappell on Pritchett’s effectiveness, but also places some of the blame on Albany’s black protestors, arguing that they seriously underestimated their opponent.

Fairclough did more than most Albany historians in terms of stretching the history of black activism in Dougherty County in his study of SCLC. He admitted “blacks had never been entirely quiescent,” and charted the growth of the local NAACP branch, established in 1919 and boasting over 1,000 members at its peak in 1946.<sup>7</sup> He described other various efforts by black organizations in Albany such as the Criterion Club and the NAACP Youth Council to improve black living conditions before King’s arrival. While his emphasis on pre-1961 Albany is welcome, it is also brief and lacking in significant detail. For the most part, Fairclough did not depart from the usual tale of Albany’s defeat

---

<sup>5</sup> Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 85.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 86.

that built up Pritchett as a shrewd magistrate who outsmarted King and his fellow activists at their own nonviolent game.

In 1989, Clayborne Carson provided a brief look into SNCC's grassroots organizing efforts in the movement—something that Fairclough and the King biographers failed to do. Carson is one of the first writers to discuss the role of religion in the movement. According to Carson, the movement “demonstrated not only the appeal of SNCC's militancy to urban blacks but also the importance of Afro-American religious beliefs and institutions as a foundation for mass struggle among blacks in general.”<sup>8</sup>

However, Carson marginalized Albany's history of black organizing, stating that the town “experienced little protest activity before 1961.”<sup>9</sup> Despite this shortcoming, Carson still provided the best account to date of SNCC's pre-King organizing efforts in Albany. Carson picked up the story of Albany in 1961, when Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon arrived in nearby Terrell County, Georgia to begin a voter registration campaign. SNCC workers quickly expanded their project to include Albany and Dougherty County, but ran up against stiff resistance from whites and other black organizations, such as the NAACP.

Carson's chapter on Albany is short, stretching no more than ten pages. Clayborne's brief discussion seems a bit more optimistic about the fate of the Albany movement than the King biographers, but does not truly see it as a victory. Carson, like most other writers on Albany, leaves the story in 1962, perpetuating the myth that the movement ground to a halt after King's departure. “In a purely instrumental sense,” he

---

<sup>8</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 56.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

argues, “the Albany protests could be viewed as a serious setback for the civil rights movement.”<sup>10</sup> In his opinion, while the Albany Movement cannot be viewed as a resounding victory, it did serve a profound purpose for SNCC organizers by convincing them “that their strategy of organizing had broad support among the black residents.”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, Carson’s assessment was partially correct: SNCC organizers did gain confidence and experience from the movement, but so did the people of Albany, who began forming their own opinions on issues, making their own decisions, and empowering themselves to fight for equal rights. This side of the story, told from the perspective of Albany’s residents, is absent from Carson’s work.

The early 1990s brought fresh perspectives on the Albany struggle. In 1991, Fred Powledge, a reporter with years of experience covering the civil rights movement, published *Free at Last: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It*. Chronologically, he did not differ much from the major King biographies—the bulk of his two chapters on Albany revolved around its high-profile protests. But the conclusions he drew about the movement marked a pointed contrast to earlier accounts. In terms of characterizing the Albany Movement as a success or failure, Powledge remained on the fence. He termed the movement “a failed success,” arguing that while Pritchett and his crew did thwart King’s efforts, it did not stop the movement from persisting past 1962. Powledge used the voices of SNCC activists to debunk the myth that Albany was “King’s show.” One particular quote from movement leader Charles Sherrod responded to the idea of failure in Albany:

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

“Down through the years,” said Charles Sherrod, who stayed on in Albany, “the only thing that Albany is going to be remembered for, perhaps, is the place in which King failed. The place that got King. But I ask the question: How can the movement have failed when all of the goals that we had in 1962 were accomplished? How can we have failed when we’re no longer segregated? How can we have failed when we are sharing the power?”<sup>12</sup>

Powledge toed the line, agreeing with other scholars that Pritchett and the segregationists may have won the battle but they didn’t win the war. Perhaps the most important victory of the Albany Movement, he noted, existed in the minds of Albany’s citizens. According to Powledge, “Albany brought an end to what Charles Sherrod had seen when he first visited southwest Georgia: the fear Negroes had of those who would be their masters...Albany was a major failure not for the Movement but for the segregationist white South.”<sup>13</sup>

While Powledge provided valuable questions about the movement’s longevity, they went unanswered until Michael Chalfen published two articles on Albany in 1994 and 1995.<sup>14</sup> Chalfen went to Albany and interviewed those who participated in the movement. He explored newspaper articles, court records, and oral histories in order to show that Albany residents had not given up on change after King’s exit. Chalfen

---

<sup>12</sup> Fred Powledge, *Free at Last?: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It*, (Boston: Little Brown, 1991), 417.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 418–19.

<sup>14</sup> See Michael Chalfen, “Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945–1965,” *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 37–64; Michael Chalfen, “‘The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 560–98.

stretched the chronology of the Albany Movement, looking at the pre-1961 and post-1962 history of the town. By providing an expanded timeline for the movement, Chalfen identified a strong base of racial activism in Albany from the post-World War II period to the late 1960s. Chalfen described the efforts of organizations that flourished in the late 1940s and early 1950s, such as the NAACP, the Criterion Club, and the Dougherty County Voters League.

Chalfen also went beyond 1962, showing how African Americans continued to organize and demand equal rights throughout the 1960s. He highlighted Reverend Samuel B. Wells's mayoral campaign of 1965, which garnered thousands of votes and renewed African Americans' interest in city politics. He described how C.B. King, one of three black lawyers in Georgia at the time, chose to stay in Albany his entire life to fight segregation through the courts. King served as lead attorney on several important cases dealing with racial discrimination, most notably *Johnson v. City of Albany*, which ended discriminatory practices in local government employment.

Chalfen was quickly joined by another graduate student, Alan Bradley Schrade of the University of Georgia, whose 1995 thesis, "Bad Baker, Terrible Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany,"<sup>15</sup> provided a welcome look at the interplay between rural and urban civil rights movements in southwest Georgia. To his credit, Schrade correctly noted that prior accounts had privileged the Albany story while ignoring what happened in its surrounding rural counties, where racial violence and intimidation reached a level unheard of in the city. Indeed, SNCC activists, Voter Education Project workers (VEP),

---

<sup>15</sup> Alan Schrade, "'Bad' Baker, 'Terrible' Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany: SNCC and the Interplay between Rural and Urban Civil Rights Movements in Southwest Georgia" (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Georgia, 1995).

and leaders of what would become the Southwest Georgia Project (SWGP) all worked to alleviate the dire situation in the region's countryside. They joined homegrown local activists, who put their lives on the line to register black voters and upend the rigid system of Jim Crow that defined life in the Black Belt. Any study of Albany, Schrade argues, would be incomplete without a simultaneous investigation of its rural neighbors.

Schrade was not the first UGA graduate student to explore southwest Georgia's civil rights saga. In 1972, Paul D. Bolster's dissertation provided the first statewide study of Georgia's civil rights struggle, "Civil Rights Movements in Twentieth Century Georgia."<sup>16</sup> Though his study was never published, it would presage future statewide civil rights studies that would begin to arrive over a decade later.<sup>17</sup> Although his chapter on Albany followed what would become the "classical phase" timeline employed by King biographers, it relied on valuable archival research coupled with some of the earliest oral history interviews conducted with Albany Movement activists. His chapter on the movement in nearby Americus became the first treatment of the rural face of civil rights action in southwest Georgia, long before Mr. Schrade began his thesis.

A more recent statewide study has taken the title of "most thorough treatment of the southwest Georgia movement." Published in 2005, Steven G.N. Tuck's *Beyond Atlanta, The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia*, is an impressive examination of the civil rights movements conducted in twentieth-century Georgia. The study draws on

---

<sup>16</sup> Paul D. Bolster, "Civil Rights Movements in Twentieth Century Georgia (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Georgia, 1978)".

<sup>17</sup> The gold standard for statewide civil rights studies were set by the following three books: John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (University of Illinois Press, 1994); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (University of California Press, 2007); Adam Fairclough, *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972* (University of Georgia Press, 1999).

nearly 200 interviews with black and white activists, as well as a voluminous archival source base, to trace the evolution, and sometimes de-evolution of movements outside of Atlanta, which has received its share of lauded studies in recent years. Tuck explores southwest Georgia's movements in Albany, Americus, and the surrounding rural counties over the course of the (relatively) long civil rights movement. A good degree of his accounts come from the Southwest Georgia Project, established by veterans of the Albany Movement, which conducted several campaigns to improve black lives throughout the late 60s and 70s.

After Tuck came the first monograph to focus squarely on southwest Georgia. Published in 2014, Lee Formwalt's *Looking Back, Moving Forward* provides a concise tour through southwest Georgia's 200-year history of racial strife. Formwalt, who spent decades as a professor at Albany State University and helped create the Albany Civil Rights Institute, showcases his encyclopedic knowledge of the region's history. Covering 200 years in 98 pages, Formwalt's book is meant for the popular reader. His ability to provide an accurate and readable general history of such a broad time period is impressive. Formwalt's work remains a fantastic survey of Albany's tumultuous and complicated history.

The latest work to visit southwest Georgia was David P. Cline's *From Reconciliation to Revolution: The Student Interracial Ministry, Liberal Christianity, and the Civil Rights Movement* (2016). Cline's study profiles the Student Interracial Ministry (SIM), an organization founded alongside SNCC in 1960 committed to desegregation while also imparting a liberal Christian message of racial harmony. SIM sent dozens of northern college kids down to southwest Georgia where they joined Charles Sherrod's



Southwest Georgia Project to help register voters. Cline's work is crucial for understanding the cleavages between organized religion and the civil rights movement, particularly in southwest Georgia, where Charles Sherrod based his work heavily on sermons and scriptures. Ultimately, Cline adds to our understanding of the way that outside organizations continued to assist in the movement after 1962, but by focusing so heavily on SIM, he highlights just how fleeting their contributions were, as most northern students returned home not long after arriving in southwest Georgia.

Finally, looming on the horizon, Ansley Quiros, an Assistant Professor at the University of North Alabama, will soon be publishing *God With Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942-1976*.<sup>18</sup> The study focuses primarily on the Sumter County seat of Americus. Quiros primarily investigates the theological aspects of the movement, arguing that the black freedom struggle "must be seen as a theological and religious movement as much as a political event." Her work provides a sharp analysis of how southwest Georgia activists justified their campaigns through the concept of "lived theology."

Considering the wealth of material produced on this topic, it's fair to ask: where does "Settling Down for the Long Haul" intercede? Perhaps that question can be answered best by explaining what it does *not* do. I have deliberately chosen not to focus on the limited role of Martin Luther King, Jr. He shows up briefly in one chapter and little time is devoted to his day-to-day activities during 1961-1962. That story has been exhaustively told by his biographers, and I felt including a largely synthetic retelling of King's involvement would only perpetuate his disproportionate influence over the larger

---

<sup>18</sup> Ansley L. Quiros, *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942-1976* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

history of the movement. What is more important—and what this project does—is try to devise the recipe for a mass movement in Albany, Georgia. Ordinary people do not wake up one day and decide to challenge the status quo, especially when that status quo has been reinforced and defended with violence of every conceivable form. The Albany Movement was like a large cauldron of water that had been simmering underneath a fire for decades. The goal of this dissertation is to show how, when, and why the flames grew brighter, to pinpoint the combination of historical forces that brought that water to boil, and to show how the fire continued to blaze for decades after.

The project begins by following the Jim Crow generation in southwest Georgia, explaining how African Americans established a movement culture that set the foundation for future protests. The chapter describes how Albany grew from a run-of-the-mill cotton town in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to a bustling regional hub for commerce by World War II. It explains how African Americans, while not equally sharing in the growing economic pie, nonetheless saw a gradual improvement in their fortunes. Black men and women flooded in from the surrounding countryside as mechanization forced them off the land and into the city, but there they found better jobs as industrial workers and small business owners. During the postwar period, the expansion of the black professional class in Albany was the most crucial step along the road towards direct-action protest. Money—and the ability to make it outside of white control—was a prerequisite for any sustained protest campaign. When the Albany Movement formed in 1961, economically autonomous men dominated its leadership. President William G. Anderson was a doctor with an all-black clientele. Vice President Slater King was a real estate man from the wealthiest black family in town. His brother

C.B. was chief legal counsel. Secretary Marion Page was a federal postal employee. Money mattered.

The first six decades of the twentieth century saw real progress for southwest Georgia's black population. When interviewed years later, most members of the Jim Crow generation agreed that the hard work of economic survival precluded most overt forms of defiance. A strong black professional class led the way—doctors, letter carriers, business owners—established the first chapter of the NAACP in 1919, and led its resurgence after World War II. The rise of the NAACP and other vibrant black organizations set the stage for the Albany Movement.

But the black community was by no means monolithic. In fact, many African Americans chose not to get involved in these activist-minded civic organizations. The postwar period featured a constant seesawing battle between more cautious conservative black leaders and those willing to buck the system. The rise and fall of Joseph Holley underscores that point. The first chapter's title, "You Can't Build a Chimney From the Top" was a phrase coined by Dr. Joseph W. Holley, who founded the Albany Bible and Manual Training Institute in 1903. Holley, born in 1874 to former slaves in South Carolina, earned a quality education by gaining the favor of prominent northern whites. After graduating from Lincoln University, he was inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, whose essays on the plight of blacks in southwest Georgia piqued Holley's interest. Holley relocated to Albany where he founded the Albany Bible and Manual and Training Institute (later known as Albany State), the first all-black college in the region.

Holley was a conservative black administrator in the mold of Booker T. Washington. “You Can’t Build A Chimney From the Top” was comparable to Washington’s “lay down your bucket where you are.” He championed hard work, and exhorted his fellow black Albanians to learn a trade, avoid racial activism, and slowly move forward. That was the recipe for success in the Black Belt of Georgia, where segregation was enforced through any means necessary. But Holley’s cautiousness was gradually supplanted by a desire for more. That desire was encapsulated most prominently in his successor, Dr. Aaron Brown, who forged a close relationship with the NAACP and encouraged students toward a more aggressive assertion of their rights. Brown took fire for his approach, and was eventually forced out of his job by more conservative black community leaders unhappy with his militancy. Holley’s downfall, Brown’s arrival, and Brown’s downfall reveal the fissures in the black community throughout the early postwar years. By the start of the 1950s, southwest Georgia’s black community stood at a crossroads. The NAACP, under constant assault from angry whites, began to dwindle. Black voter registration campaigns became scant. Outsiders like Aaron Brown challenged the hesitant black establishment to do more, but for the foreseeable future it seemed only a small group of African Americans had the stomach to push forward.

Chapter Two, “Equality is a Word You Just Don’t Use,” explores the crucial period before and after the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision outlawing segregation in public schools. The 1950s was a dynamic time in southwest Georgia: the local economy was booming and many whites embraced the new prosperity with open arms. At the same time, they anxiously received the *Brown* news, and obsessed

over its implications. White leaders told themselves it was misguided federal overreach, and assured each other that schools would remain segregated forever. But as they made their way through the decade, convinced nothing would change, they ignored the subtle warning signs that something was wrong in the black community. African Americans were unhappy, and over the years they began to ask for modest improvements to the infrastructure of their communities, for the local newspapers to cover more than just the crimes committed by black suspects, for one—just one—black policeman to patrol the black neighborhoods. Whites did listen, but never took these demands seriously. With each denial, with each patronizing assurance that perhaps things would change at some floating point in the future, whites paved the road toward the Albany Movement.

Chapter Three, “Do You Want To Be Free?” begins with a detailed profile of the “Baby Boomer” generation in southwest Georgia and argues that it was these black teenagers, unshackled by their parents’ memories of the violent Jim Crow era, that sparked the Albany Movement. The chapter follows the lives of several future activists as they slowly began to realize throughout their childhoods that they were somehow different. It shows how small bouts of mistreatment cut deep mental scars into their psyche, scars that would never heal but whose pain would drive them to confront their oppressors head on. That energy, however, needed direction. The creation of an NAACP Youth Council in 1959, driven largely in response to an impromptu sit-in at the local movie theater, gave the kids their first taste of organized protest, and fostered a new sense of community among the black youths of Albany. When Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon arrived to conduct a SNCC voter registration campaign in 1961, they quickly teamed up with high schoolers and college students who were ready for a fight.

Long before Martin Luther King, Jr. was invited to speak in southwest Georgia, SNCC had targeted the region for a concerted voter registration campaign. Charles Sherrod, a former divinity student and founding member of the organization, joined Cordell Reagon and Charles Jones in the heart of the Black Belt in October 1961. They soon radiated out to the rural counties around Albany, where they spent their time talking to poor farm workers, trying to convince them to take the first step toward the franchise.

Sherrod and Reagon found many who were terrified to register, some would refuse to talk to them, others crossed the street to avoid being seen near them. Back in Albany, however, a section of the black community was becoming fed up with second-class citizenship. On November 1, 1961, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued a ruling outlawing segregation on interstate transportation. Charles Sherrod and the “snicks” jumped at the chance to test the local bus station. After some negotiating with the local NAACP (which seemed to always caution against brash action) they sent nine students from Albany State to conduct a sit-in at the terminal. Although none were arrested that day, the die had been cast, and a discussion began among the various leadership groups in the black community. On November 17, 1961, those discussions turned into action, as the “Albany Movement”—an umbrella organization representing the NAACP, SNCC, the Ministerial Alliance, the Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Negro Voters League—formed, with the expressed goal of ending desegregation in Albany.

One of the most impressive and unique direct-action campaigns of the civil rights movement followed. It seemed to touch every part of the struggle—Freedom Riders arrived and were arrested, Martin Luther King arrived and marched in the streets,

thousands of ordinary people spent dark nights in the county jail, waiting to hear that the city had agreed to their demands, a notice that never came. The national press arrived, emblazoning the movement's drama on their front pages. The federal government had its eye on Albany—FBI agents swarmed the town, the Justice Department begged whites to negotiate, and President John F. Kennedy himself addressed the matter on national television. But the collected gaze of the nation was not powerful enough to overturn white Albanians' commitment to an old way of life, an established hierarchy. Negotiating, they feared, would create a slippery slope. Even if some white leaders could stomach the idea of a few blacks eating in their favorite restaurants or sitting near them in a bus terminal, they were not willing to fathom what might happen when activists turned their focus to the local school system, or decided to run for political office.

What this chapter demonstrates, though, is the growing revelation that Albany Movement leaders found enemies not only at City Hall but within their own meetings. They could always count on Police Chief Laurie Pritchett finding out their next move from spies—"Uncle Toms," as many of their peers called them—attending planning sessions. Even among fellow supporters, drama persisted. The NAACP didn't trust SNCC, and bitterly resisted its waning influence, even resorting to backdoor dealing to preserve it. SNCC leaders resented King's towering presence in Albany, and saw him as a spotlight-hungry opportunist. Older more conservative leaders distrusted younger more militant activists, and opposed their more aggressive measures, which they saw as unnecessarily dangerous. The chapter highlights the tensions and rivalries that hamstrung the movement, follows the mercurial trajectory of direct-action protests, and ends with the departure of King towards the end of the summer in 1962. After he left, King branded

the campaign a failure, while those who stayed behind took a deep breath and got back to work.

Chapter Four, “Still Water That Runs Deep,” picks up after the dust settles following King’s final departure. It was clear that those who had been on the front lines of the direct-action movement felt a keen sense of disappointment following his exit. One SNCC worker compared Albany to “a bag that has been slowly and laboriously blown up with air and then busted.” In that moment, though, leaders dug in their heels and prepared “for the long haul.”

To be sure, the levels of intensity, exposure and community engagement achieved during the “classical phase” would never again be equaled. That is not to say the veterans who remained became any less radical. A large part of the chapter is devoted to the remaining “Snicks,” a tight-knit group of young college students who spent their post-King years conducting a series of small protests that both challenged and infuriated local whites.

At the same time, simmering resentment from whites over the civil rights demonstrations the year before gave way to a new determination to resist. In a bold move, the city voluntarily desegregated all of its facilities in 1963, pre-empting a looming court order but local newspaper owner James Gray purchased the public pool and re-opened it to whites only. The pattern became clear: if whites could not prevent desegregation, they would get the jump on privatizing their favorite local enclaves.

Like many other black communities, Albanians turned their sights on the dual targets of political representation and school desegregation in the remaining years of the 1960s. As such, this chapter will focus on several political campaigns that threatened to



reshape the region's power structure in the mid to late 1960s, as well as the concerted effort to bring about real school integration through the courts.

New dreams of black political participation, however, met with the oppositional structure of city government and the reassertion of white supremacy. Nearly 5,000 registered black voters consistently failed to repudiate the will of the city's white electorate, which held a two-to-one advantage at the polls. Even at the ward level, black leaders who envisioned a role for themselves as city commissioners could not make the political arithmetic work in a system that diluted the African-American vote by making all candidates run in citywide elections. Question for later, had it always been that way or was this an anti-civil rights strategy?

Throughout the rest of the 1960s, the Albany Movement relocated from the streets to the courthouses and voting booths. Black candidates ran for city commission posts, congressional seats, and the governor's mansion, to no avail. In a doomed campaign for city commissioner in 1965, Reverend Samuel B. Wells and his supporters complained of harassment from police and local authorities. Teenagers carrying "Vote for Wells" signs were arrested on multiple occasions. Wells was locked up for "passing handbills without a license." Authorities refused to allow poll watchers, turned away black voters, and curiously struggled to find names of registered blacks on their lists. All the while, local journalists warned that "white voters have not yet awakened to the dangers of an arch-integrationist having a voice in Albany city government."

The fight to desegregate the city's public schools turned into a parade of foot-dragging from white administrators, who pleaded with federal judges to accept their "freedom of choice" plans as a token of good will. The Fifth Circuit responded: "that for

a school system which is beginning its plan of desegregation ten years after the second Brown decision, more speed and less deliberation is required.” Despite prodding from federal judges, integration proceeded only slightly faster through a “stairstep plan” that opened a few grades per year to black pupils wishing to attend previously all-white schools.

Despite the obstacles laid in their paths, black leaders created grassroots political campaigns and attempted to send their kids to all-white schools. Eventually the judicial system provided small openings, forcing school integration in 1965, when 31 teenagers became the first black students to ever enroll at Albany High. The chapter uses oral histories to reveal the human toll that desegregation levied. The chapter follows the day-to-day encounters between black students and their sometimes-understanding-sometimes-racist teachers and peers.

Taken as a whole, the late 1960s cannot be said to be a great leap forward for the black community as a whole. Desegregation was token at best, every political campaign mounted by a black candidate failed, and the economic plight for many remained dire. But the spirit of resistance and protest survived the crucial post-civil rights phase, and it would be resurrected with a passion in the coming decade.

Chapter Five follows the story of New Communities, Incorporated (NCI), an ambitious black agricultural cooperative founded by Albany Movement veterans in 1968. Its founders saw many reasons for NCI’s creation. Charles Sherrod began investigating cooperative models after dozens of black farmers who he’d helped register to vote came to him after being evicted by their landowners. The problem of black land loss provoked similar investigations across the South in the late 1960s, and new cooperative solutions

emerged from that search. NCI was designed as a community land trust, where residents would own individual plots of land while also cooperatively farming a larger plot of farmland. The profits from selling the collectively cultivated crops would sustain a community by providing badly needed cash and a sense of purpose to those with nowhere else to go.

NCI's story provides a window into the struggle for economic equality in southwest Georgia, particularly in the rural counties in and around Albany, where segregation and discrimination continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter also follows the organization's long battle to secure funding from recalcitrant federal bureaucrats, who actively and passively opposed the project at every turn. It highlights NCI's difficult struggle to marshal the resources of the federal government to improve their community during the post-civil rights era. Particularly, it focuses on the crucial turning point in the late 1960s, when the Nixon Administration took hold of the War on Poverty and began to whittle down the options that had once been available to black activists. Though it failed to reshape the rural economic plane of southwest Georgia, NCI served continuing notice that black residents were nowhere close to giving up on the original economic goals that drove them into the streets in 1961.

Chapter Six, "Until Hell Freezes Over," runs chronologically parallel to NCI's story. The difference is largely in the setting. While NCI sprung from Albany, it operated in the rural county just north of the city. This chapter, however, follows the account of a 1972 strike waged by an overwhelmingly black group of municipal sanitation workers. Although the strike looms large, the majority of the chapter focuses on its aftermath. After describing the city's hard-nosed response to the strike, which broke the back of the

labor movement in Albany, it goes on to discuss the fight to desegregate public employment through the courts.

In his 1976 ruling for *Johnson v. City of Albany*, Judge Wilbur Owens did more to actually desegregate Albany than any other person. By issuing a strict hiring order, he forced city bosses to bring black workers up to a proportionate share of city employment. Owens's order would stay in place for nearly two decades, during which time it was assailed by several white opponents, who painted the order as reverse racism enshrined in law. While the political landscape of Albany shifted in the post-*Johnson* era, the workplace remained largely stagnant for African Americans. As the 1980s rolled on, it became clear that if black workers were to climb department ladders, they would do so under a cloud of suspicion from many of their white peers. That suspicion began to surface in a series of complaints and lawsuits that would punctuate the last two decades of the twentieth century. The chapter concludes with a detailed account of the behind-the-scenes political maneuvering and public outcry that accompanied the repeal of Owens's order in the early 1990s.

"Until Hell Freezes Over" demonstrates just how difficult it became to preserve the legal underpinnings of post-civil rights progress. It engages with contemporary labor historians, particularly by challenging the accepted timeline of the "worker replacement strategy" by arguing that the calculus that forced politicians to the negotiating table in urban America did not apply in southwest Georgia.

The last chapter, "Let Justice Roll Down Like Water," investigates the Flint River Flood of 1994 and its aftermath. In early July, Tropical Depression Alberto blanketed Albany with more rain than it had ever seen, swelling the Flint River to historic heights

and creating a trail of destruction throughout the region. The flood hit the black community—concentrated heavily on the south and east sides of town near the river—particularly hard, forcing nearly 20,000 people from their homes.

“Let Justice Roll Down Like Water” follows the struggle to rebuild Albany after the cameras left. Resentment and tension brewed from the start of the flood, when many residents of the historically-black south side of town began accusing white city leaders of diverting floodwaters towards them to save the more affluent north side of town. Although they had little concrete evidence, those who accused the city of wrongdoing did so largely out of frustration for the years of mistreatment and neglect visited upon the struggling black parts of town. This chapter captures that sense of frustration, and uses the testimonies of South Albany’s dispossessed residents to highlight the persistent lack of trust between the town’s white and black communities. The final section of the chapter considers the lessons of the flood, arguing that while African Americans have made significant political strides since 1961, the original economic goals of the movement have yet to be realized.

Albany, Georgia, is not a large city, and it’s not a small city, it’s somewhere in the middle, just like its legacy. It’s a town that gave birth to one of the most important early campaigns of the national civil rights movement but became a footnote to that movement’s narrative. Most of its residents—white and black—did not participate in or actively oppose direct-action protests during the 1960s. Those who marched in the streets fought each other behind closed doors for control, they postured for the press, they made mistakes, they underestimated their opponents, they were human. The black freedom struggle had a high tide and a low tide, but its defining characteristic was its ability to

adapt to changing circumstances. The Albany Movement was not a success, but neither was it a failure. Unlike the violent struggles in Birmingham and Selma, Albany did not produce new federal legislation or coerce national politicians to intercede. But Birmingham and Selma were the exceptions, Albany was the rule. Across the South, many movement battlegrounds looked more like Albany. They were ordinary, medium-sized towns—Greensboro, Durham, Winston-Salem, St. Augustine, Jackson—where the pace of change proceeded more like a slow burn than the explosions in Birmingham and Selma. Their most salient victories took decades, not years. Their goals were multifaceted, constantly changing, and always responded to the needs and desires of local people. Their achievements were often temporary, and many of their most pronounced advancements were rolled back over the years. The one constant—the one unwavering transformation—took place in the minds of every black man, woman, and child who lived through the struggle. Wyatt Tee Walker said it best:

More important than anything else, the nonviolent direct action thrust sensitized the Negro community to the injustice and immorality of the system of segregation...Whatever your sociological position, whether your vantage point is near or far, one naked truth is clear, Albany will never be the same again. You have not heard the last of that southwest Georgia city.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Wyatt Tee Walker, “The American Dilemma in Miniature Albany, Georgia” (Conference on Civil Disobedience and the American Police Executive, Fifth Avenue Hotel, New York, March 26, 1963), [http://www.crmvet.org/info/6303\\_sclc\\_walker-albany.pdf](http://www.crmvet.org/info/6303_sclc_walker-albany.pdf).

## CHAPTER ONE

### “YOU CAN’T BUILD A CHIMNEY FROM THE TOP”: THE JIM CROW GENERATION IN SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

In southwest Georgia, racism and segregation had roots as deep as the cotton shrubs that dotted its endless pastures. During the Civil War, the area provided so much of the plant that it became commonly known as “the Egypt of the Confederacy.” Slavery had built Albany—the undisputed capital of the region—into a majority-black town where rich white planters profited handsomely off the backs of an army of unfree laborers. As the Confederacy crumbled, however, some blacks left the farm for the growing city of Albany, where they began establishing independent churches, building new schools, and registering to vote for the first time.

Planters made new arrangements to preserve their agricultural and domestic workforce. The brief taste of black political power quickly vanished as “Redemption” brought southwest Georgia back under white control. During the closing decades of the nineteenth century, new state and local laws officially sanctioned Jim Crow as the ordering mechanism of life in the Black Belt. As the new century approached, a cascade of disfranchisement laws—the cumulative poll tax in 1877, the all-white primary in 1900, and literacy tests and property qualifications in 1908—made it nearly impossible for blacks to vote. By 1915, only 28 African Americans were registered to vote in Albany.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lee W. Formwalt, “The Origins of African-American Politics in Southwest Georgia: A Case Study of Black Political Organization During Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-1867,” *Journal of Negro History* 77, no. 4 (1992): 211.

Visiting the area in the summer of 1898, W.E.B. Du Bois described southwest Georgia as “a land of rapid contrasts and of curiously mingled hope and pain.” His research would form the basis of two chapters in his celebrated 1903 study, *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he painted a grim portrait of African American life in Albany. “Below Macon,” he noted, “the world grows darker; for now we approach the Black Belt,—that strange land of shadows at which even slaves paled in the past, and whence come now only faint and half-intelligible murmurs to the world beyond.” It was a land filled with debt-ridden black sharecroppers living in crowded, dilapidated cabins. Families of eight and ten occupied one-room houses. Most could not read, and as a result were “ignorant of the world about them, of modern economic organization, of the function of government, of individual worth and possibilities—of nearly all those things which slavery in self-defence [sic] had to keep them from learning.”<sup>2</sup>

Still, Du Bois glimpsed a small window of opportunity for black advancement in southwest Georgia. There was Deal Jackson, who owned over a hundred acres. There was Dark Carter, “whose neat barns would do credit to New England.” There was “Pa” Willis, “the tall and powerful black Moses who led the Negroes for a generation” as the local Baptist preacher. There was Jack Delson, the wealthiest black farmer in southwest Georgia, a “great broad-shouldered, handsome black man, intelligent and jovial,” who owned 650 acres and employed 11 black tenants. “I turn from these well-tended acres,” Du Bois observed, “with a comfortable feeling that the Negro is rising.”

---

<sup>2</sup> Lee W. Formwalt, “‘Corner-Stone of the Cotton Kingdom’: W. E. B. Du Bois’s 1898 View of Dougherty County,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 693–700.



Indeed, over the next half-century, fortunes did improve for some black residents. Even for those who could not find economic security, new institutions arose to help chart a more vigorous course of action. As in many locales in the South, the experience of war emboldened many African Americans to reassert their rights upon returning home to Albany. Between 1918 and 1919, new chapters of the NAACP arose in Albany, as well as nearby Thomasville and Valdosta. Whites tolerated the NAACP in the cities, albeit with some suspicion and hatred, but in the rural counties that surrounded them, where lynching rates soared and virtually no black middle class existed, African Americans would not establish local chapters until after World War II.<sup>3</sup>

That is not to say that rural southwest Georgia had no organizations for blacks. Ironically, it was in the most dangerous and backward counties that Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Agency (UNIA) took hold. To the beleaguered black farmers beyond Albany's city lights, Garvey's message of racial separatism and back-to-Africa plans seemed a welcome alternative to the unyielding repression of rural Jim Crow. Of the 34 UNIA divisions in Georgia in 1926, over half were located in southwest Georgia. Even in those counties without a division, envelopes poured in from farmers, some containing money, some with letters of support.<sup>4</sup>

Some protested with their feet, joining the Great Migration northward, hopping the train for the promise of jobs and racial tolerance that eluded them in the Black Belt. More often than not those travelers came from the worst parts of southwest Georgia—the

---

<sup>3</sup> Lee W. Formwalt, "A Garden of Irony and Diversity," in *The New Georgia Guide* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 507–8; Formwalt, *Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Southwest Georgia Freedom Struggle, 1814-2014*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> Mary Rolinson, *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 108, 166, 198, 204–5, 210–13; Formwalt, *Looking Back, Moving Forward*, 24.

rural counties surrounding Albany. These trips would have to be planned in secret. If discovered, white landowners would do anything possible to keep their workers on the farm. Stories abounded of white bosses frantically driving to the train station to grab their tenants before they boarded. Fleeing workers quickly learned to buy two tickets, one to Albany, and then another after arriving there, to their preferred destination. As historian Lee W. Formwalt put it, “the result was the Georgia black belt became paler over time.” By the 1950s, blacks no longer commanded a majority of the Dougherty County population.<sup>5</sup>

This “great migration” mixed with a number of other ingredients over time to push the black community towards the brink of outright defiance. At the most elemental level, the most profound change took place within the black families of southwest Georgia, where the rural, hard-working economic survivalism of the Jim Crow generation paved the route for a more educated, privileged group of heirs to begin moving to the city. To that generation of black children who were born during the Great Depression and grew up during the age of Jim Crow, they remembered their parents as hardworking people who sacrificed everything with the hope that their children might get the education that they had been denied. C.W. Grant, who would go on to mentor student activists at Albany State College during some of the most heated racial moments of the 1960s, spent his childhood days in Jacksonville, Florida rummaging through the dump for items to sell. His mother died when he was two, leaving his father, a minister, to become the “strict disciplinarian” who would push him toward success. Grant described a world

---

<sup>5</sup> Formwalt, *Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Southwest Georgia Freedom Struggle, 1814-2014*, 24; Emmett Jay Scott, *Negro Migration During the War* (Oxford University Press, 1920), 31, 59–62, 72–86, 166–67.

where folks understood the obstacles in their path. “We had an instinct of survival,” he remembered, “We knew what it was we could and could not do.” There was, as many southwest Georgians remembered, a stark choice presented to African Americans during this time—economic survival or defiance against Jim Crow. “It was much easier to make that choice,” Grant recalled, “because in that day economic survival was everything, and economic survival could mean three or four dollars.”<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the hardest journey to make was from the poor farm life of rural southwest Georgia to the promise of opportunity in Albany. No one personified that rags-to-riches story more than Thomas Chatmon, Sr. Born in 1919 as the oldest of eight children, Chatmon grew up on a tobacco farm in Coffee County, Georgia. Like many black children born on the farm, he learned to pick cotton at the age of four. His father worked as a supervisor on the largest tobacco plantation in Broxton, a small rural town in South Georgia. The school year lasted seven months, although parents frequently kept their children at home when they needed help bringing in a crop. Chatmon’s parents, however, insisted he attend school every day. After his mother died in 1936, 17-year-old Thomas was forced to leave school and help his father in the fields. “I was part slave,” he recalled, “I have worked many days on the farm, sunup to sundown for forty cents or two dollars a week.” He and his father survived by planting their own crops and slaughtering their own chickens, hogs, and cows. Chatmon also managed to pick up some extra cash shining shoes at a local barbershop on the weekends. There, he saw white men turn a cold shoulder to black acquaintances they had been friendly with the day before while working together in the fields. “It was a funny thing,” he remembered, “you could work

---

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Cornelius W. Grant, June 22, 1994, Behind the Veil Oral History Project, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

all the week in the field with a white fella and when you would get to town on Saturday he'd turn on you." Following his mother's advice, Chatmon learned to hold his tongue around whites to avoid trouble.<sup>7</sup>

To return to school, Chatmon and his father put in extra time to raise enough crops to sell off and finance his education. But when they went to settle up, the boss claimed they had no money coming. Chatmon, who kept his own meticulous records, was infuriated and began to protest. As soon as he started talking back, his father stomped on his foot to shut him up. Chatmon was incensed, but he understood why his father silenced him: "because them crackers would kill you if you'd dispute their word." Father and son then left the farm, hopping into their old pickup truck to make the drive back to the house. While driving back, Chatmon saw his father break down and cry for only the second time in his life. He would eventually raise the money to return to school, working three jobs to help the family out. When the Second World War broke out, Chatmon, like many other black men in southwest Georgia, enlisted. After returning, he managed to secure G.I. Bill funding to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta, eventually becoming the first black man in Coffee County to earn a university degree. Education, as Chatmon proved, was not a birthright for southwest Georgia's black population. It would not be freely given, but bitterly fought for, requiring those who would graduate to walk a long and thankless road toward success.<sup>8</sup>

Female children of the Jim Crow generation had an even harder time climbing the economic ladder. Born in 1921 in Dawson, Georgia, Viola Carter was the seventh of

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Thomas Chatmon, Sr., June 23, 1994, Behind the Veil Oral History Project, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

twelve kids. At age nine she and her family moved to a plantation in neighboring Lee County, where Carter began working in the fields. When she wasn't working she would walk the five miles to and from the one-room schoolhouse located in an old church. There, an overworked, solitary teacher taught grades one through ten. To manage that Herculean task, she would break the students up into groups, allowing the older kids to teach the younger ones. Back home, the family helped put food on the table by cultivating a garden and raising their own livestock.<sup>9</sup>

Like many girls coming of age in the Deep South, Carter found herself married and pregnant at the age of fifteen. She moved with her twenty-year-old husband to Miami, where she worked sporadically as a maid. Her marriage soon became strained, and after a few years away, she returned to southwest Georgia. Carter followed the crowd of rural migrants toward Albany, where "they wasn't paying much, but you could get a job." Black residents could easily find housing on the south side of town near the Flint River, where many rented rooms in boarding houses until they found a permanent residence. Though the town itself remained firmly segregated, newcomers found good work in the growing collection of factories and military bases in the area. Carter's husband helped build the Turner Field Air Base and then worked at the local Firestone plant. In the meantime, Carter had two more children and built a life in Albany. When the Albany Movement began ramping up years later, she would attend mass meetings and volunteer to march.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Viola Carter, June 24, 1994, Albany, GA, Behind the Veil Series, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

As the lean times of the Great Depression gave way to the boom that surrounded World War II, African Americans left the farm, finding a new and exciting set of opportunities in Albany. Melvin George, born in 1935 in Early County, spent his adolescence watching Albany grow into an industrial powerhouse. “There were many more jobs available in Albany,” he noted, adding that “black men, many of them came from the rural area,” and during the 1940s they became “more productive than any city south of Atlanta.” There were few jobs that provided the desirable combination of wealth and independence. At the top of the list stood the letter carrier; not only was he well-paid, but his checks came from the federal government, rendering him largely immune from the economic pressure often visited upon black activists. A common pathway to economic success started at the post office and ended with business ownership. George’s father, who worked as a letter carrier, soon exchanged his earnings for a self-service grocery store in Albany. Others got their start in the lucrative insurance market, selling policies to the local black community. However they came by their seed money, one thing was undeniable by the 1950s—a black economic base was taking shape in southwest Georgia.<sup>11</sup>

New black businesses sprang up, and alongside them came a growing sense of camaraderie. “There were other men who had insurance companies, there were other men who had grocery stores, men who owned taxicab companies, men who owned dry cleaning businesses...and furnishing jobs for other blacks,” George remembered. “They realized the hardships they had come under, and in their own cunning way, they were outsmarting the white man to get what they want.” That sense of community was

---

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Melvin George, June 15, 1994, Behind the Veil Oral History Project, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

partially imported from the surrounding rural counties, where residents “still had embedded in them that love and respect for each other, and that feeling of brotherhood.”<sup>12</sup>

The boom times were intoxicating. To read newspaper articles and promotional pamphlets extolling the business prospects of Albany is to witness the absolute fever of economic boosterism that gripped the city in the postwar era. “This town is growing so fast,” one article exclaimed, “that local mail carriers are no longer fazed when they discover a new street, complete with houses and people, has been added to their route seemingly overnight.” Boosters touted the city’s strategic location on the Flint River, at the crossroads of several rail lines, and alongside major highway arteries. But buried deeper in their pitches was an acknowledgment of the structural forces pushing folks off the land. “The surface has only been scratched,” according to Lansing B. Mays, president of Citizens & Southern Bank, “our industrial development will continue because we have an ample supply of healthy labor due to reduced farm acreage and mechanization.”<sup>13</sup>

Albany’s gradual but persistent industrialization began in 1936 when city leaders raised \$20,000 to purchase a plant site for the Cudahy Packing Company. The \$400,000 meatpacking plant opened that year in East Albany. The company soon began employing an interracial workforce, and by 1941, blacks and whites earned equal wages. Black veterans like Samuel B. Wells, who would go on to become a leading minister of the Albany Movement, found work there after the war. “I was running a rotator machine,” Wells beamed, “and I had seven white girls working under me.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> James Flowers, “Industrial Awakening Typified by What Made Albany, Ga., Grow Fast,” *The Owasso Argus-Press*, February 10, 1954.

<sup>14</sup> Rev. Samuel B. Wells, Samuel B. Wells Interview, June 22, 1994, Behind the Veil Oral History Project, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library;

Indeed, it was the arrival of two major meatpacking chains, Cudahy and Armour, that had the largest impact on workplace desegregation in Georgia. As early as 1933, both companies agreed to desegregate all their southern facilities, including branches in the southwest Georgia towns of Albany, Tifton, and Moultrie. Although strident opposition from whites precluded the integration of locker rooms and cafeterias, their decision allowed black southwest Georgians like Samuel B. Wells the rare opportunity to work alongside and in some cases above whites.

As the northern packinghouses moved south, union leaders followed. The most successful of them, John Henry Hall, hopped off the train from Chicago and traveled into the heart of southwest Georgia in 1944. He planted roots in Moultrie, one of the most rigidly segregated hamlets in the region. Hall was a man who knew how to talk to people, and he put his skills to use immediately. Within two years he had already organized a strike that temporarily crippled Swift's Peanut Pork Factory. Newspapers showed remarkable scenes of interracial cooperation, including an image of black and white veterans perched underneath a sign that read, "we whipped Tojo, Mussolini, Hitler. We'll whip Swift." The union push in southwest Georgia inspired others to take part, like Samuel B. Wells, who became a CIO representative for his Albany plant. While serving, Wells helped organize a short-lived ninety-day strike for better wages. Wells and the other workers survived only on the meager stipend provided by the union, which soon ran out. They also struggled to break down the defensive marriage between local politicians and factory executives. "I remember a police came out there one day," Wells recalled,



“...he said y’all know y’all can’t beat the power structure...he didn’t say nothing about whether we were right or wrong. He just said we couldn’t beat them.”<sup>15</sup>

As historian Stephen G.N. Tuck has noted, the challenge from packinghouse unions, while an exceptional moment in southwest Georgia’s history, “was not a revolution because even here integration was a by-product and not the primary goal of the union agenda.” The limited amount of union activity did little to alleviate the poverty of Albany’s black ghetto or challenge the personal segregation that dictated life in southwest Georgia. It was, however, part of the larger transformation of the region that began to slowly undermine Jim Crow. During the 1940s, over a million black southerners moved from the farm to the city. In Georgia alone, the number of urban black professionals more than doubled from 1930 to 1950.<sup>16</sup>

The rise of the black professional class, however, did not inevitably lead to protest. This certainly held true for Albany, where black leaders often split into conservative and aggressive factions. Throughout the early-to-mid-twentieth century, those factions struggled for power and influence in southwest Georgia. Even up to the moment that direct-action protests erupted in 1961, black power brokers, behind closed doors, alternately feuded over whether to tap the brakes or hit the gas. That power struggle became most heated within the halls of Albany State College, the region’s leading institution of higher education for blacks and a source of pride for the whole community.

---

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 35; Samuel B. Wells Interview, Behind the Veil.

<sup>16</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 35–36.

Although it would later become the reservoir of youth for the protest campaigns of the 1960s, from its early days Albany State remained a quiet destination of higher learning. It had not always been “Albany State.” In its embryonic form, it had been known as the Albany Bible and Manual Training Institute. Its founder, Joseph Winthrop Holley, would come to epitomize the buttoned-down accommodationism of that certain group of black leaders who ascended to prominence during the nadir of American race relations. Born in 1874 to former slaves in Winnsboro, South Carolina, Holley ingratiated himself with benevolent whites throughout his early life. Reverend Samuel Loomis, a northern clergyman and educator, saw to it that Holley was sent to train for the ministry at Revere Lay College in Massachusetts. While studying at Revere Lay, according to Holley, he happened upon a catalog for Phillips Academy. While looking through the alumni list, one name stuck out to him—“the Honorable Rowland Hazard of Peace Dale, Rhode Island.” On a supposed whim, Holley walked several miles to Hazard’s home, where he impressed the wealthy benefactor, who agreed to write a letter of recommendation and loan him the money to attend the prestigious academy.<sup>17</sup>

To the skeptical observer, Holley’s life, as he portrayed it, seemed to overlap with an astoundingly prestigious cast of characters. Holley’s 1948 autobiography, *You Can’t Build a Chimney From the Top*, included two prominent anecdotes. First, he told of meeting Frederick Douglass on a park bench in Providence, Rhode Island in 1891. Holley recounted his conversation as follows: “Mr. Douglas, you have lived in both the old and the new dispensations. What have you to say to a young Negro just starting out? What should he do?” “Agitate! Agitate! Agitate!,” responded Frederick Douglass. Four years

---

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Winthrop Holley, *You Can’t Build a Chimney from the Top: The South Through the Life of a Negro Educator* (William-Frederick Press, 1948), 13–20.

later, Holley recounted his conversation with Booker T. Washington, which just happened to occur right after his 1895 Atlanta Cotton Exhibition Address propelled him to national prominence: “Mr. Washington, you have lived in both the old and the new dispensations. What have you to say to a young Negro just starting out? What should he do?” “Work! work! work!,” Washington responded. Holley took the latter advice.<sup>18</sup>

Around 1903, Holley, now a recent graduate of Lincoln University, read W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*. He was particularly drawn to the two chapters on Dougherty County, Georgia, which exposed him to the “vast ignorance which festered untouched there.” He then “got down on my knees, and prayed: ‘Lord, give me the courage to go to Dougherty County and strike a blow at the ignorance portrayed by Mr. DuBois.’” Armed with a strong resolve—as well as \$2,600 given by his old benefactor, Holley organized a Board of Trustees and bought fifty acres of land along the Flint River.

In its first few decades, the school grew steadily, gaining new benefactors and improving its campus. In 1917, after Rowland Hazard’s death produced new concerns that the school would not survive without public funds, Albany Bible Manual and Training Institute became Georgia Normal and Agricultural College (GNAC). Joining the state system brought another stream of money into the school, but also subjected GNAC to the bureaucratic oversight that would challenge Joseph Holley’s autocratic hold on the institution. The move into the public realm also meant that Holley would now have to enter the political arena. He would have to master that delicate balancing act of lobbying

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., vii–viii.

(and flattering) white supremacist legislators while advancing his school—and by extension, the black community.<sup>19</sup>

Holley proved to be quite skilled in the art of transactional politics, though that success came at a price. Throughout his life, even in his twilight years when he no longer ran his beloved school, Holley's statements on the "race problem" could just as easily have been written by George Wallace. In a 1935 speech before a white audience in Statesboro, Georgia, Holley argued that "the educational requirements of the people who are only a few hundred years out of the jungle are not the same as those of people who have had thousands of years of civilization back of them." But if that were true, his 1946 autobiography, published after his retirement, becomes harder to explain. In it, he subscribed to the Dunning School interpretation of Reconstruction, arguing that it was "common knowledge that Negro voters begged white men to run for office," since they were woefully incapable of self-government.

On contemporary matters, Holley's views looked more like the writings of a Dixiecrat politician on the make than a man inspired by W.E.B. Du Bois. He portrayed the black electorate as largely ignorant, swaying to the whims of "outsiders who have small interest in him." "Our election laws should be revised in such a way as to confine the ballot to persons who are trained and know the value of the franchise," he argued. If that meant implementing property and educational requirements, so be it. On the perpetually stalled federal antilynching bill, he noted that "In spite of the agitators in and out of Congress, the Southern people, on their own motion and without outside interference, have gradually reduced the number of lynchings almost to a vanishing point.

---

<sup>19</sup> Thomas V. O'Brien, "Perils of Accommodation: The Case of Joseph W. Holley," *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 4 (2007): 821–22.

“The same thing is true of the Poll-Tax Bill,” he claimed, “...while Congress has debated, the Southern States have acted, so that today there are only three or four States where that law is in effect.” As for the recently created Fair Employment Practices Commission, Holley argued that it was “not necessary, or even the best approach to the question of employment for colored people,” going on to brand labor unions as “the Negro’s greatest enemy.” Again and again, Holley answered criticisms with the same response: the South could take care of itself.

Holley’s stalwart defense of the South’s most troubled legacies translated into a bitterness that festered towards the end of his life. By 1943, the once-powerful administrator found himself jobless, forced into retirement by a growing group of enemies within his own institution and across the state. His slow decline began during the Great Depression. As state funds for education dwindled, historically black colleges took the hardest hit. At GNAC, Holley faced opposition from his own teachers, who resented his tight grip on the school. The Great Depression had forced Holley—who previously served as a largely absentee president—to spend more time on campus. It took only a few years of his constant presence before faculty members staged a revolt. In 1934, several professors lobbed accusations of “fraud and intimidation” at Holley, claiming he misappropriated funds and mistreated his colleagues and students. One disgruntled professor characterized the school as “a slaughterhouse for teachers.” The 1934 insurrection lost steam after Holley refused to leave and the chancellor found insufficient evidence to remove him. Despite his survival, the episode shrouded Holley in controversy and created a new army of enemies waiting for any opportunity to oust him.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 826–27.

The last seeds of Holley's demise were sown from the statewide educational reforms that began in earnest during the Great Depression. Efficiency and oversight became the buzzwords of the day, and power was redirected and consolidated between a new Atlanta-based chancellor and a board of directors, both of whom reported to the governor. The new bureaucratic regulations did not sit well with Holley, who was accustomed to the old, informal system that allowed administrators significant leeway in governing their institutions. A new wave of do-gooders composed of reform-minded Southerners and philanthropic Northerners began lobbying for a standard curriculum for black and white schools. Holley took this as a challenge to his authority and began pushing back. First, he enlisted the help of his major donors, who wrote letters opposing the new measures and threatened to stop writing checks. Holley's biggest mistake, however, came when he threw his lot in with the racist demagogue Eugene Talmadge, who ascended to the top of Georgia politics during the 1930s. Talmadge's old-timey populism appealed to Holley, who saw the governor's calls for a return to the rustic schoolhouse as an opportunity to sideline the progressive movement he refused to join.

By 1940, Holley had gone all-in on Talmadge's last gubernatorial campaign. Holley publicly demonstrated his support with a one-hundred-dollar donation and six sheep that he provided for a Fourth of July barbecue following a sizeable Talmadge rally near Albany. Holley must have felt buoyed when Talmadge won his fourth term as governor later that year. But any optimism Holley had about his improving fortunes was quickly dashed after Talmadge carried out a purge of several professors, administrators, and members of the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia. The bizarre episode, during which Talmadge railed against communists, Jews, and liberals for

allegedly promoting integration in the classroom, led the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to pull their accreditation from the state's white colleges. The fallout from the affair brought Talmadge his first electoral defeat in 1942 when the moderate State Attorney General Ellis Arnall won the Democratic primary.

After the dust settled, Holley found himself with a crumbling network of supporters, no political benefactor, a renewed class of reformers breathing down his neck, and a chorus coming from black leaders in Georgia and across the nation, all with the same conclusion: he was "a sellout" and "a traitor to his race." Within a year of Talmadge's defeat, the GNAC board forced Holley into retirement. After being removed from power, Holley joined his wife in Philadelphia, where she had taken a job as a special assistant to the president of Lincoln University. Holley soon found that the South was still in his blood, and returned to Albany in 1945 to live out the rest of his days alone on his farm. He tried and failed to regain his old job, and opened a shirt factory that soon closed up as well. In his spare time he wrote his memoirs, defending his long-held positions on segregation, race relations, and politics, trying to make sense of a world that seemed to be passing him by. His health finally failed him during the summer heat wave of 1958, when he drew his last breath in the basement of Albany's segregated hospital.<sup>21</sup>

Holley's ignominious retreat from prominence signaled a changing of the guard in southwest Georgia. Older, more conservative black leaders like Holley were being slowly supplanted by a younger, more defiant generation. It was no coincidence that new voices of protest became louder during the 1940s, as World War II remade the South and its black residents. Over a hundred thousand black men and women flooded into Georgia's

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 837.

military bases from all over the country, encountering a new, harsher set of racial customs. Violence ensued. In 1941, unknown assailants hanged a black private from a tree in the woods outside Fort Benning, near Columbus. Newspapers reported race riots at Augusta's Camp Gordon, Fort Benning, and Savannah's Camp Stewart. Black soldiers, it seemed, were no longer willing to stomach the humiliation of Jim Crow. In towns small and large, black Georgians watched as African American soldiers openly defied racial mores. They sat in the front of the bus; they talked back to policemen; they challenged white supremacy in ways that would have seemed impossible a decade earlier.<sup>22</sup>

The momentum that began during World War II kept its pace after southwest Georgia's 1,100 black veterans returned to find the same segregated, racist home they had left behind. Frustration led to action, and action spread throughout the black community. The enthusiasm and idealism of the "greatest generation" breathed new life into the local branch of the NAACP, which boasted over 1,000 members by 1946. The next year, Albany's black letter carriers formed the Criterion Club, a group of black professionals that would go on to serve as one of the guiding forces behind the Albany Movement. A year later, Criterion Club leaders pushed for the creation of the Dougherty County Voters League (DCVL), which began building a small but committed black political base that would prove crucial when organizing support for a mass movement.<sup>23</sup>

The postwar era saw the rise of new black leaders and the resurgence of established Albany figures. In nearly every organization that arose and reawakened

---

<sup>22</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 26.

<sup>23</sup> Formwalt, *Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Southwest Georgia Freedom Struggle, 1814-2014*, 29; Michael Chalfen, "Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 41-42; Michael Chalfen, "'The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 563.



during these years, the name “C.W. King” could be found. Clennon Washington King—known to everyone as “C.W.”—had lived a remarkable life. Born in 1891 to a poor farming family in “Two Egg,” a tiny hamlet on the Florida panhandle, C.W. dreamed of one day leaving the farm. As a teenager, he literally walked away, setting off on foot towards the leading destination for black advancement—Tuskegee Institute. Family legend described what happened next: “Upon reaching Tuskegee, he told Booker T. that he wanted to get that education,” recalled his daughter-in-law Carol King. Soon, C.W., who had extensive experience working with horses back on the farm, somehow talked his way into a job as chauffeur to none other than Booker T. Washington himself. C.W. ferried the prominent educator to and from the train station, in the meantime absorbing his philosophy of hard work and racial uplift, though he would go on to defy Washington’s advice to accept segregation in exchange for economic prosperity. Still, he idolized his boss, often saying that “everything I am, and whatever I hope to be, I owe to Booker T.”<sup>24</sup>

Outside the classroom, C.W. met the love of his life at Tuskegee—Maggie Slater, a native of Milledgeville, Georgia. Their courtship lasted until after C.W. served in World War I, after which they married and moved to Albany in 1919, following King’s father Allen James King, who worked as a drayman for the railroad in Georgia, hauling dirt used to build rail beds. Stories passed down through the generations about why C.W.’s father had ended up in Georgia. One suggested that Allen had done something to draw the ire of the white community in North Florida. His great-grandson remembered Allen

---

<sup>24</sup> John Head, “Patriarch’s Legacy of Self-Reliance and Hard Work Leaves an Indelible Mark on next Generations,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 26, 2000, sec. M.

King as “a man who had very little tolerance for white people showing him disrespect.” It would seem that C.W. inherited his father’s independent streak.<sup>25</sup>

Although he had come of age under the tutelage of Booker T. Washington, C.W. quickly embraced the philosophy of the NAACP, co-founding the first Albany branch after returning from World War I. From its beginnings, the local branch was controlled by the well-to-do black men of Albany. Its three co-founders embodied that fact—C.W. King was a letter carrier and an up-and-coming businessman, Dr. Joseph Cheevers was a dentist, and Millard F. Adams was a Presbyterian minister. And while whites certainly did not welcome the new black organization, they seemed to tolerate it enough for C.W. King to amass a small fortune over the next few decades. Soon after arriving in southwest Georgia, C.W. opened “The Little Wonder Cafe,” Albany’s first black restaurant (though some customers who encountered C.W.’s very light-skinned wife Maggie thought it was owned by a Greek family). By the time organizing picked back up in the postwar era, C.W. King owned a women’s clothing store called “The Swank Shop,” a bus service, a newspaper, two neighborhood grocery stores—“The Busy Spot” and “The Super Spot”—and several parcels of land. “By opening several businesses,” his son Paul King remembered, “my father was trying to inspire other black people to start businesses.” C.W.’s wealth provided him with the independence needed to take a leading role in the push for black voter registration and the types of modest civic improvements requested by African-American leaders after World War II.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 37; Chalfen, “‘The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 537; John Head, “Patriarch’s Legacy of Self-Reliance and Hard Work Leaves an Indelible Mark on next Generations.”

But it wasn't just black business owners who absorbed the spirit of postwar activism. Since replacing Joseph Holley as President of Albany State College in 1943, Dr. Aaron Brown made it clear that he did not share his predecessor's conservative worldview. He quickly moved to convert the school—formerly a two-year institution specializing in Tuskegee-style industrial education—into a four-year, degree-granting, accredited liberal arts college. Under his tenure, enrollment soared, a student council was formed, Greek organizations appeared, a college annual was published, the first student-run newspaper circulated around campus, and new sports teams began competing. Unlike his predecessor, Brown forged close relationships with his faculty members and encouraged them to expand their academic horizons by publishing in journals and contributing to the local newspaper. After only a few years under new management, it became clear—a new era had begun at Albany State.<sup>27</sup>

An invigorated campus began to coalesce around the idea that students and faculty should take a more active role in the community. Perhaps the most startling break from Joseph Holley's legacy came in 1943 when Brown approved the formation of a new NAACP branch on campus. Not only did he sanction its arrival, he fostered its growth, encouraging students and faculty alike to join by mounting a membership drive in 1944. After the war, young black men returned from the battlefields of Europe determined to procure the education that Uncle Sam had promised them. In 1946, Albany State welcomed 79 veterans into its freshman class, one of whom had been a member of the Women's Army Corps. The former service members banded together for support, joining Gamma Iota Alpha, which represented "honorably discharged veterans." Students also

---

<sup>27</sup> Titus Brown, *Albany State University: A Centennial History: 1903-2003* (Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 27.

came in from different parts of the country, creating their own organization in 1946, the “Cosmopolitan Club,” formed to “exchange ideas from the different sections of the country.” The postwar era brought forth new students, new teachers, new administrators, and most importantly new ideas about what Albany State could and should be.

Not content to confine his role to campus, Aaron Brown looked outward, demonstrating from the outset a willingness to identify the struggles facing the black community. Within two years of arriving in southwest Georgia, Brown produced a sociological study—“The Negro in Albany”—which dissected, in sometimes painful and clinical detail, the grim world created by years of discrimination. Throughout his work, he refused to pull punches. He described the substandard houses many blacks lived in, including photographs that exposed the depths of poverty in the poorer sections of town, where black residents lived in tin-roofed shotgun shacks situated on beat-up dirt roads, with crumbling chimneys, no plumbing to speak of, and only the occasional withering patch of grass. The city provided very few options for escape—only one public housing complex existed for working-class blacks, and those who were unable to secure one of its fifty-six apartments were forced into the overpriced and decrepit homes available in the private rental market.<sup>28</sup>

Even in the field of religion, Brown did not hesitate to deliver sober judgments. “There are entirely too many churches in Albany,” he declared. “Most of them,” he added, “are unsightly and without competent leadership.” Indeed, there was no shortage of options for black parishioners, who had 30, mostly Baptist churches to choose from. Class divisions within the black community were mirrored in the church system as well—

---

<sup>28</sup> Aaron Brown, *The Negro in Albany* (Albany Ga., 1945), 10–12.

where one chose (and was welcomed) to worship often depended on his socioeconomic position. At the top of the list stood Mount Zion, a handsome red brick building on Whitney Avenue known colloquially throughout the black community as the “Big Nigger Church.”<sup>29</sup>

Although some dissension and infighting plagued the black church, for the most part it remained a stable and beneficial support system for the community. For the city’s younger residents, many of whom would soon join the front lines of the Albany Movement, only a skeletal framework of institutional support existed. “The educational facilities are deplorable,” Brown observed, “and recreational activities are at the lowest possible ebb.” He continued, arguing that “when there are no clubs, play grounds, Y.M.C.A. or similar organizations, the inevitable results are those characteristics of juvenile delinquency.” Brown struck a dire note, claiming that were it “not for the few Boy and Girl Scout troupes [sic], the meager efforts of some Sunday Schools, and the ineffective efforts of overworked teachers, there would be little or nothing which would deserve the right to be called a ‘Youth Organization’ among Negroes in Albany.”<sup>30</sup>

For those old enough to vote, though, Brown saw a system intentionally working to prevent their democratic participation. “Negroes in Albany,” he claimed, “participate in the civic and political affairs of the community only to a very limited degree.” He outlined two explanations: the obvious discriminatory restrictions thrown up by white politicians and registrars, and the “lack of interest manifested by the majority of Negroes in these affairs” (though he noted the former may have caused the latter). The voter rolls

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 25–26; Interview with McCree Harris, June 18, 1994, Behind the Veil Series, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>30</sup> Brown, *The Negro in Albany*, 36–37.

substantiated his claims—by the end of World War II, less than 1,000 (out of roughly 15,000) African Americans could cast ballots in Albany. Brown echoed the common posture of black activists in the 1940s and 1950s—express the desire for civic participation as a means to improve conditions within the black community and deny any interest in promoting racial integration, or, as Brown called it, “the ‘social equality’ bugaboo.” This sales pitch relied on highlighting the less threatening community-building aspects of black civic engagement, like the black-led War Finance Committee (“irrefutable evidence of the Negro’s loyalty to his country”), the USO Committee (“another illustration of the voluntary efforts of several Negroes to...make the maximum contribution to the War and coming Victory”), the Albany Civic League (“engaged in attempts to improve the educational and recreational facilities for Negroes”), and the NAACP (“working to advance the cause of all people...gives more attention to Negro problems because Negroes, as a group, need more help.”). In order to fully “bear his share of the responsibilities” of civic participation, the argument went, he must be able to vote. “A Voteless People,” Brown concluded, “is a Hopeless People.”<sup>31</sup>

Aaron Brown’s tenure seemed to signal a new era of black political advancement in southwest Georgia. And to be sure, his hands-on leadership sparked excitement, which translated into strengthened black institutions, renewed organizational spirit, and increased civic participation. But while Brown worked to reinvigorate the black community in Albany, larger political changes in Atlanta produced an ugly revival of racial demagoguery and violence that would slow the pace of black progress across the state. Things had been getting better since 1943 when Georgians exchanged the race-

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 56–57.

baiting populist Eugene Talmadge for Ellis Arnall, a young business-minded progressive determined to overhaul the state's "Tobacco Road" image. For a time, he seemed to accomplish just that, repealing the poll tax, lowering the voting age, improving the state penal system, creating a teacher's retirement program, and paying down the state debt. Arnall's meteoric rise was equaled only by his swift decline. Georgia's southern Democrats began logging his political sins; he first drew the ire of party insiders by leading the push to renominate Vice President Henry A. Wallace, a liberal despised by most white Georgians, during the 1944 Democratic National Convention. Arnall truly lost his constituency, though, after touching what proved to be the third rail of Georgia politics: he refused to oppose a recent court ruling that outlawed the white primary. Arnall's opponents quickly pounced, branding him "a traitor to the white race," an accusation that whipped supporters of his old foe Eugene Talmadge into a frenzy. Talmadge rode that wave of anger to the 1946 Democratic nomination, which he won on the pledge to reinstate the white primary.<sup>32</sup>

After the dust had settled from the wacky and infamous "Three Governor's Controversy,"<sup>33</sup> Eugene Talmadge was dead and his son Herman had replaced him in the

---

<sup>32</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 101; Harold Paulk Henderson, *The Politics of Change in Georgia: A Political Biography of Ellis Arnall* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Harold Paulk Henderson, "Ellis Arnall (1907-1992)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, August 12, 2002, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/government-politics/ellis-arnall-1907-1992>.

<sup>33</sup> In the summer of 1946, Eugene Talmadge won his fourth Democratic gubernatorial primary, only to die of cancer before taking office. His supporters instigated a new election in the Georgia Legislature, where his son Herman was elected the new governor. But the newly-elected Lieutenant Governor, Melvin Thompson, claimed the governor's office was his constitutional right. Meanwhile, the outgoing governor, Ellis Arnall, refused to leave office. Eventually the Georgia Supreme Court settled the matter, installing Thompson as acting governor until a special election could be held (Herman would go on to a romp in that 1948 race). It was a mess. See Charles S. Bullock III, Scott

governor's mansion. Following in his father's footsteps, Herman adopted the fiery rhetoric of the Dixiecrats, vowing to oppose integration at all costs. The racist vitriol that rehabilitated the Talmadge political dynasty filtered down through the cities and towns of Georgia. Suddenly, modest steps toward African-American progress sounded loud alarm bells in the white community. In the years leading up to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, white Georgians tightened their already uncompromising embrace of Jim Crow. Georgia's Ku Klux Klan, having been relatively dormant during the war, boomed during the late 1940s. Only twelve Klaverns existed during World War II; by 1949, there were 110. In a prophetic column, *Harper's* reporter Calvin Kytle marked Herman Talmadge's ascendance as the beginning of a "long, dark night for Georgia." Given the benefit of hindsight, historian Stephen G.N. Tuck characterized the period in stark terms, claiming that "the extent and violence of white supremacist forces in Georgia exceeded that in the rest of the South."<sup>34</sup>

Racial violence peaked in the rural counties of southwest Georgia, where local sheriffs perpetrated and sanctioned numerous beatings and murders. And while the spate of brutality had a chilling effect on protest activity in the region, some blacks refused to be intimidated, often at the cost of their lives. One of the most high-profile lynchings of the postwar era took place a little over an hour north of Albany in rural Taylor County. Maceo Snipes, a black veteran, had returned to Butler, his hometown of fewer than 2,000 people, where he became determined to vote during one of the most heated moments in

---

E. Buchanan, and Ronald Keith Gaddie, *The Three Governors Controversy: Skullduggery, Machinations, and the Decline of Georgia's Progressive Politics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015)

<sup>34</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 70–74; Formwalt, *Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Southwest Georgia Freedom Struggle, 1814-2014*, Chapter 4, 29.



Georgia political history. In the midst of the Talmadge revival, Snipes set out to test the recent federal court decision opening the Democratic primary to all races. Georgia's white voters raged at the possibility, and in communities throughout the state, they banded together with the Klan, putting the word out that any attempts to break this color line would be met with violence. Squarely acknowledging the threats, Snipes pushed ahead anyway, and stepped into his local polling station on July 17, 1946, becoming the first black man in Taylor County ever to do so. The next day, Snipes and his mother Lula went to his grandfather's farmhouse to have dinner. Four white men pulled up in a pick-up truck and called for Snipes, who met them outside. At some point during their encounter, Edward Williamson, a fellow veteran and rumored Klan member, shot Snipes in the back. Badly wounded, Snipes made it to Montgomery Hospital in Butler, where he waited in a room "that better resembled a closet" for six hours before doctors performed surgery to extract the bullets. Still cogent and talkative after his surgery, Snipes could have been saved. However, his white doctor soon told him the bad news—he desperately needed a blood transfusion, and the hospital had no "black blood" on hand. Snipes was left to wither away in his room, where he died from his injuries two days later. Fear, even panic, began to spread in the black community. Rumors circulated that anyone who attended Snipes's funeral would be killed. And so, in the middle of the night, Snipes's uncle Felix and a local funeral home director laid him to rest in an unmarked grave. Such was the fate that awaited those who dared to challenge Jim Crow under the new political order.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Erin Elisabeth Hecht, "Maceo Snipes," *The Georgia Civil Rights Cold Cases Project*, August 15, 2014, <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/emorycoldcases/maceo-snipes/>;

The campaign of violence and intimidation terrified even the most committed of activists, especially in the NAACP, which eroded during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Within a year of the 1946 gubernatorial primary, Georgia's NAACP membership rolls were cut in half. The organization's entire statewide network teetered on the brink of collapse. Savannah branch president Reverend Ralph Mark Gilbert tried desperately to organize a statewide coalition, reaching out to leaders of the Negro Baptist Convention, the Grand Lodges, black insurance companies, and colleges, to no avail. Gloster Current, the NAACP's director of branches, brushed off Gilbert's pleas for help, and Georgia's branches continued spiraling downward. Dejected and exhausted, Gilbert washed his hands of the NAACP in 1949. Writing to the head office, he reflected the despondency of his peers. "It is very hard to keep this going," he lamented, "this keeping up of an active interest in the NAACP...it is next to impossible to get workers." As 1950 arrived, Georgia's pre-eminent black organization limped into the new decade with only eleven branches and a dwindling constituency.<sup>36</sup>

---

"Answers Sought in 1946 Ga. Killing," *The Washington Post*, February 13, 2007; Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 71.

<sup>36</sup> Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 71–72.

## CHAPTER TWO

### “EQUALITY IS A WORD YOU JUST DON’T USE”: THE BREWING OF THE ALBANY MOVEMENT

For southwest Georgians, the 1950s were relatively quiet—black protest efforts in Albany remained modest, and few campaigns took off in the rural hinterlands. The forced tranquility allowed white residents to convince themselves that the restive days of 1946 had passed. Like most southern towns, Albany’s white population had come to believe that its black residents were doing just fine. For white teenagers like Hamilton Jordan (pronounced “JER-dun”), who would go on to become Jimmy Carter’s Chief of Staff, Albany was a bucolic Shangri-la where no one preoccupied themselves with the race issue. Only looking back years later did he begin to notice the glaring inequalities that lay just beneath the surface. But in the 1950s, Hamilton Jordan considered Albany “the biggest acting small city anywhere,” that had just about everything—hotels, nice restaurants, department stores, military bases, and Radium Springs, a glittering body of deep blue water that stayed warm all year long. Saturdays brought folks in from all over “SoWeGa” to spend their weekly paychecks. Men in overalls sat on top of their pickup trucks, chewing Bull Durham tobacco or taking drags off Lucky Strike cigarettes while talking about the next political race or last night’s high school football game. Meanwhile, their wives and daughters, dressed in their “Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes” perused the downtown department stores. Old farmers lounged on green wooden benches around the county courthouse; those who got a bit thirsty escaped to snag a beer, tucking the bottles

into their overalls. On warmer days you would see fishing poles jutting out of car windows while the drivers made their way down to the Flint River to buy bait “from a thriving business run by young, shirtless black boys in blue jean cutoffs.” Head out any direction from Albany and you would be greeted by pecan trees lining both sides of the road, and looking farther into the distance you would see orchards with their “seemingly endless rows” of mature trees. When harvest time came in the fall, Jordan remembered, “swarms of black women wearing long dresses and white turbans” gathered pecans all day, methodically tossing them into tan croaker sacks.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the only unsavory part of town was “Ragsdale,” a bustling skid row of large houses sporting neon signs and wide front porches where ladies of the evening would lounge, occasionally shouting at passers-by. Of course, as Hamilton Jordan insisted, “the good citizens of Albany did not let this great sin stain its reputation as a good Christian—and overwhelmingly Baptist—community.” The Ragsdale girls met with the usual stigma attached to working women of the South, though once a week department store owners would have “Ragsdale hour,” allowing the madams to bring their girls shopping for a brief period of time. “Of course,” Jordan remembered, “all the proper women got off the street in a hurry for fear that someone would think that they were one of them,” while the men would also vanish “for fear one of the girls might recognize one of their clients and call out his name.” The brothels operated well into the early 1950s when officers from the two local military bases got tired of their soldiers constantly returning to their barracks suffering from gonorrhea.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Jordan, *A Boy from Georgia: Coming of Age in the Segregated South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 16–17.

<sup>2</sup> Jordan, 18–19.

But behind every relaxing day, every casual shopping trip, and every pleasant moment in the life of a white southwest Georgian was Jim Crow, which provided social order and a ready explanation for inequality. Segregation explained why a former Ragsdale girl could marry a wealthy businessman and, within a few years, be welcomed into what Jordan called the “exclusive, gossipy, but obviously forgiving” Albany Junior League, “while the community’s upstanding black women were relegated to standing in the corner in uniform, pouring glasses of iced tea on command.” It explained why Hamilton Jordan was never sure about the true population of his hometown. “Some reports said there were eighteen to twenty thousand,” he recalled, “while the Chamber of Commerce suggested that Albany was ‘a thriving city of about 25,000 people.’” He learned that the latter figure had been settled on because the federal government could never find white census takers who would venture into “colored town,” so they just made an educated guess at the size of the black neighborhoods. Segregation explained why the curiously named Pine Avenue (curious since it was lined with palm trees), which ran east to west through town, served as the dividing line between the white and black communities. It explained why almost no whites rode the city bus, which “existed almost exclusively to transport black women and men from South Albany over to jobs on the white side of town, where they cooked, cleaned houses, and did yard work.”<sup>3</sup>

Of course, to accept such a system as natural, white southerners had to concoct several rationalizations. In many discussions on the matter, defenders would revisit the enduring mental wounds of a century ago. The Civil War still weighed heavily on the men and women of southwest Georgia. “We were all still suffering in the 1940s from the

---

<sup>3</sup> Jordan, 19–21.

Civil War,” one white Albanian reflected, “the bigoted Yankee politician was holding us all down.” The intensity of the argument relied on shifting blame for the South’s problems onto the proverbial “outsider”—the dreaded Yankee—whose flagellation of the moribund Confederacy sent the South into a tailspin from which it still hadn’t recovered. Southerners heard the outsiders chattering, saying they were preoccupied, even obsessed with preserving control over their black neighbors. The truth was, many whites coming of age in the pre-*Brown* South paid little attention to what was going on across “Pine Avenue”:

“I remember it differently,” Jordan mused. “There was nothing to be preoccupied about. Segregation was legal, accepted, and understood. It was the bedrock of the political and economic system as well as the social order. There was not a blatant or open or even a subtle challenge to segregation in the 1940s and early 1950s...I am ashamed to say that...while growing up in South Georgia, I was oblivious to the system of segregation and its odious implications; that oblivion carried on well into my teenage years. Yes, I noticed along the way many ironies and injustices of the system, but I accepted—like my ancestors and most of my contemporaries—the unfair system I lived in and, through my silence, condoned and consequently supported it.”<sup>4</sup>

While Hamilton Jordan ignored the oppression his world was built on, African Americans did not. The easy summer days of the 1950s masked a festering unease within the black community, one that would brew throughout the decade until it exploded into the streets. That process was a subtle one, but the warning signs—which most whites missed—hid beneath the edifice of segregation that Jordan and his peers felt so at ease with. That comfort in saying “no” to incremental requests—requests meant to improve black life within the confines of Jim Crow—proved to be the beginning of the end of de jure segregation in Albany.

---

<sup>4</sup> Jordan, 21.

To put it simply, white residents were too intoxicated by the city's economic prospects to care about segregation. Albany became a veritable boomtown in the 1950s. Albany, as the glowing pamphlets and newspaper columns read, stood at the forefront of the new "industrial awakening" sweeping the South. Georgia was in the midst of selling itself, and that mission paid dividends, as new factories and office parks sprang up across the state, seemingly overnight. Up in northwest Georgia, Rome welcomed a new \$25,000,000 General Electric transformer plant in 1954. At the same time down in the southeast corner of the state, Jesup celebrated news that Rayonier, Inc. would build a new \$30,000,000 wood cellulose plant. Albany embraced the competition with an intense civic spirit. "No visitor can doubt this spirit when he walks along the city's clean, bustling, palm-lined streets," wrote journalist James Flowers. No longer would Albany cling to the vestiges of an outdated agricultural economy. "There is a commercial vigor here," Flowers claimed, "that might disappoint the traveler who is out to find the romantic decay of the Old South." As he prepared to ascend to the mayor's office in 1954, local politician Taxi Smith promised that his term would be "geared to the progress of Albany." "We're the sixth city in the state now," he noted, "and we're going to do our derndest to replace number five and number four."<sup>5</sup>

The economic markers were there. Postal receipts, a good barometer for the economy, had increased five times over the past twenty years, clocking in at \$475,000 and rising. The population was expanding—63 percent since 1940 to about 40,000 residents (by 1960 that number would jump to 55,000). Slowly but surely, industry replaced agriculture as new plants pockmarked the city. There was the Clark Thread

---

<sup>5</sup> James Flowers, "Industrial Awakening Typified by What Made Albany, Ga., Grow Fast," *The Owosso Argus-Press*, February 10, 1954.

Company Plant, which employed about 1,000 workers. There was Merck and Company's new 700-acre pharmaceutical plant. There was A&M Karagheusian, "makers of carpeting," which relocated to Albany in 1952 and promised to build a \$1,000,000 corrugated box factory soon. The list of factories and their products went on: "farm implements, hosiery, bottling plants, peanut butter, candy, cotton, and peanut and pecan processing." Local businessmen could barely contain their glee. One of Albany's biggest boosters was Thad Huckabee, head of Southeastern Warehouses, a company that leased factory space to wholesale distributors. "Industrialization is the best thing that ever happened to us," Huckabee boasted, and he assured companies that "They came to the right town. It's fast-moving with plenty of life and get-up." George Farkas personified the switch. Owner of the Farkas Mule Barn, which had for 80 years been the go-to spot for farmers in need of pack animals, sold his last mule and tore down the barn. A retail shopping center now stood in its place. The wheels of industry were churning in Albany, and its residents felt as though the good times had only just begun.<sup>6</sup>

But even with that blanket of mental security, white Albanians could not help but worry when news came down that the Supreme Court had dissolved the legal underpinnings of their cherished way of life. On May 17, 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision became front-page news, and simultaneously brought forth messages of concern and assurances that the ruling would not be enforced. "Albanians See Harm in Court Decision," read the beginning of an *Albany Herald* headline, though it was accompanied by a large disclaimer: "BUT REMAIN CALM." The *Herald* reigned supreme over the local media circuit, and on any particular morning it could be found on

---

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



the doorstep of most houses in Albany. Citizens looked to it for their national news, their local gossip, and in times of stress, they found solace in the highbrow editorials of its publisher, James H. Gray, Sr.<sup>7</sup>

Born in 1916, Gray grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts, where his father served as the district attorney. He attended Dartmouth College, where he became a veritable “big man on campus,” lettering in several sports, pledging a fraternity, and joining Phi Beta Kappa, one of the country’s most prestigious honor societies. After graduating in 1939, Gray left Hanover, New Hampshire for Germany, where he studied world history at the University of Heidelberg. When he wasn’t attending class, he spent his off hours in local bars chatting with fellow patrons about the biggest political news of the day—the rise of Hitler. Gray soon discovered his “first love”—writing. He penned several articles about the Nazi Party for the New York *Herald Tribune*. After eight months abroad, Gray returned to start his career in journalism as a reporter for the *Herald Tribune*. He left after a few months for Hartford, Connecticut, where he wrote political columns for the *Courant* for three years. In 1942, he married into Brahmin royalty by wedding Dorothy Ellis, whose father Dwight made millions in the New England textile industry and also happened to own a “plantation-like retreat” in southwest Georgia.<sup>8</sup>

When World War II arrived, Gray volunteered, serving as a Second Lieutenant in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. In 1944, he returned from battle to Fort Benning, Georgia, where he trained paratroopers during the weekdays and lounged at the Ellis plantation in his spare time. During his sojourn in Georgia he fell in love with the South, and after the war

---

<sup>7</sup> Ralph Blanchard, “Albanians See Harm In Court Decision,” *Albany Herald*, May 18, 1954.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon Thomason, “James Gray, Albany’s Mr. Power,” *Brown’s Guide to Georgia* 6, March-April 1978, 75–76.

ended, James Gray—an energetic, intelligent, enterprising young veteran—arrived in Albany intent on making a name for himself. He started writing for the Albany Herald, then a moderately sized local newspaper with a circulation of about 6,000. In 1946, Gray bought the paper. When asked how he came up with the money to do so, he would tell folks that the paper’s owners—a couple with no children in the winter of their lives—helped Gray buy the Herald so it wouldn’t be sold to a distant corporation. The other (more likely) story is that Gray took a \$250,000 loan from his wealthy father-in-law. At any rate, he proved to be a talented editor and publisher, boosting the paper’s circulation and using it as the foundation for his burgeoning media empire.<sup>9</sup>

Like all outsiders (especially northern ones), Gray struggled at first to gain the acceptance of his new neighbors. “Southern people are friendly,” he would remember, “but they resent some outsider coming in offering critical advice, then turning around and going back home.” Gray would later adopt that very same mindset when crafting his opposition to the civil rights movement. Determined to climb Albany’s social ladder, Gray quickly morphed into the quintessential southerner. In his first speech before the Albany Rotary Club, entitled “Why I Came South,” Gray waxed nostalgic about the Old South, decried the horrors of Reconstruction and the current threat of federal overreach, and, like all defenders of Jim Crow, insisted that the South could take care of itself just fine.<sup>10</sup>

Gray took that speech on the road, to local civic groups in towns big and small across the South. In the process he expanded his Rolodex, knitting a web of political and

---

<sup>9</sup> Sharon Thomason, 76.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 76; James Henry Gray, *Why I Came South: An Address before the Albany Rotary Club* (Albany, Ga., 1946) Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

business contacts. Perhaps he eyed a run for public office someday, but at the moment he simply wanted to be *known*, to be *somebody*, to rub elbows with the power brokers of the South. If observers held any doubts about his commitment to segregation, he soon put them to rest by jumping headfirst into the Dixiecrat movement. In 1948, Gray helped steer Herman Talmadge—the populist demagogue whose fiery defense of Jim Crow created an army of feverish supporters in rural Georgia—into the governor’s mansion. Three years later he got into local politics, managing Taxi Smith’s mayoral campaign. Taxi was, as one journalist put it, “an old-time political boss of Southwest Georgia who called governors by their first names and had enough clout to phone President Truman when he wanted.” On his own, Taxi held an image of political invincibility, but he ended up losing the race to upstart challenger Louis Weatherby on account of his new Yankee advisor. “We knew Taxi wasn’t vulnerable,” said Weatherby’s speechwriter, “but Jim Gray was. We used lines like ‘the silk-stockings theater crowd’ to whip up resentment of Gray.” Taxi took the loss hard, and never forgave Weatherby’s men for their attacks. But Jim Gray didn’t let it bother him; he continued to be unfailingly polite and friendly to those in power, those who could elevate him into the upper stratosphere of Georgia politics.<sup>11</sup>

Gray continued to rise, becoming president of the Albany Chamber of Commerce in 1954, his first of five terms in the position. In that role, he proved adept at wooing executives from his native region, convincing them to relocate their plants and offices to southwest Georgia, where the taxes were lower, the regulations more flexible, and labor unions nowhere to be found. Gray was a master of schmoozing; his friends remembered

---

<sup>11</sup> Sharon Thomason, “Albany’s Mr. Power,” 76–77.

him as a man who always wore finely tailored suits, puffed constantly on expensive cigars, and could drink anyone under the table. “Jim Gray caused more divorces in Albany than anyone else,” a former resident remembered, “He’d call up his cronies in the middle of the night and say, ‘Meet me at the airport in twenty minutes. We’re having a party.’” The men would hastily pack their bags, leave their wives and children, and take off in Gray’s private plane—to Las Vegas, Florida, or wherever else he wanted to go—all on Gray’s dime. The same year he began his first term as Chamber of Commerce president, Gray drew on his growing fortune to establish Albany’s first television station, WALB, Channel 10. Seven years later, that station would broadcast moving film footage of protestors filling the streets, police conducting mass arrests, and James Gray himself, criticizing and undermining the movement he helped create.<sup>12</sup>

Despite his entrance into the television market, the *Herald* would always be Gray’s baby. Beyond its utility as a transmitter for Grey’s opinions, the paper also provided a channel for the white community to vent its frustrations. The first page, though, was reserved for Mr. Gray, whose “Editor’s Outlook” headers signaled that the boss had something to say. Sometimes they were innocent enough—simple morality tales, gentle criticisms of national politicians, commentary on local happenings—but after 1954 Gray dedicated almost every word to the fight against integration. On the heels of the *Brown* ruling, Gray struck a disgruntled-yet-measured tone. “We believe that social justice for different peoples living together is best obtained through education and consultation,” he argued, gently admonishing the courts that “this method should be

---

<sup>12</sup> Sharon Thomason, 77.

tested far more fully before any federal coercion is attempted.” With each passing year, however, Gray’s responses became more defensive.<sup>13</sup>

Gray and his white readers obsessed over the implications of the *Brown* decision. For the average Joe, the mention of integration brought unvarnished anger, even threats. “I expect some of you better take some precautions,” wrote *Herald* reader Derryck Perkins, “cause the Supreme Court don’t live down here in Georgia.” There were, however, the rare even-headed responses, like that of “J. Alexander,” who in responding to Derryck Perkins, confessed that “We all felt, I believe, that some day schools would be mixed.” “Personally,” Alexander claimed, “I feel as safe as I ever have,” confidently noting that “We have seen to it that our children won’t go to school with ‘em in Georgia.” In another letter to the editor, titled “Easterner Is Moving South,” an incoming Yankee extolled the virtues of southwest Georgia for its “freedom from the Negro gangs that fester many of the northern industrial cities.” “Our family, he continued, “is going to settle somewhere in Georgia before school starts, where our children will be safe from the rampant NAACP.” The letter was signed by “R.J. Fedders and Family,” with the postscript, “Seeing Georgia from our trailer home.”<sup>14</sup>

While Albany’s white residents fumed over the *Brown* decision, the Dougherty County School Board tried to soothe the minds of distressed parents while scrambling behind the scenes to protect their schools. Their strategy, it seemed, required a strong PR offensive centering on one concept—equalization. “Great progress is currently being made

---

<sup>13</sup> James H. Gray, Sr., “Editor’s Outlook: The Court Decides—Now What?,” *Albany Herald*, May 18, 1954.

<sup>14</sup> Deryck Perkins, “Court Doesn’t Live In Georgia,” *Albany Herald*, June 4, 1955; “South Mixed For 150 Years,” *Albany Herald*, June 11, 1955; “People’s Forum: Easterner Is Moving South,” *Albany Herald*, August 15, 1955.

in educating both races,” claimed Dougherty County School Superintendent J.J. Cordell, “and in creating good relations between the races.” One year later in 1955, Cordell painted a portrait of a school system bursting at the seams with students. Since the *Brown* decision, the county saw an 11 percent surge in enrollment, and expected the same level of growth in the years to come. By 1960, officials projected that the current enrollment of 12,488 (7,586 white–4,902 black) would jump to 20,000. “We will cope with the problem in some way,” Board Chairman E.H. Kalmon promised, “We always have.” Any keen observer would see that the article was pointed towards skeptical observers, be they liberal judges or African American leaders. The clues were in the section headings, which read, in bold, “**Good Facilities**,” and “**Many Improvements**.” “This is all across the board,” Cordell said, “Every student is assured of equal facilities at this very moment,” although he allowed that “some of the classrooms are crowded.” Officials had rushed several improvements through the black schools—twelve rooms and a library at Jackson Heights; six rooms at Carver Park; eight rooms, a library, cafeteria and wood shop at Coachman Park, and a “completely new school center” at Madison High. While African Americans saw tacked-on upgrades to their decaying buildings, whites welcomed brand new schools—1955 saw the opening of the pristine Albany High and Northside Elementary.<sup>15</sup>

The slapdash improvements to the black school system revealed a white community trying to erect a veneer of equality to preserve their way of life. But black desires went beyond bricks and mortar. Mamie Daniel, who taught at all-black Jackson Heights Elementary in the 1950s, testified to the unrest within her community. Daniel

---

<sup>15</sup> Ralph Blanchard, “Albanians See Harm In Court Decision”; “School Enrollment Rises Rapidly Here; Officials Eye Segregation Ruling,” *Albany Herald*, June 2, 1955.

sensed that the “feeling that we were sort of tired as black folks...was boiling slowly before December 1961.” The Albany Movement was the physical manifestation of a steadily increasing resentment among the black community. Sure, there were the blatant forms of abuse—the segregated businesses and office buildings, the separate water fountains and bathrooms—but following the upheavals of 1961, black activists would remember the movement as a challenge of the tarnished *image* whites had assigned them. Although he didn’t know it, James Gray and his newspaper helped create the movement that would throw his beloved city into the national spotlight, where reporters would tell a grand story with Gray cast as the villain.<sup>16</sup>

If taken as a barometer for white sentiments, the headlines of the *Albany Herald* revealed a deeply jaundiced view of their black neighbors. With few exceptions, *Herald* writers only paid attention to the African American community when one of its members committed a crime. “According to Deputy Sheriff Leo Pritchard, Frank Butler, Negro café owner here, had to be convinced the hard way,” read a June 15, 1955 report titled “Sumner Negro Arrested Again On Rum Charge.” Less than a month later, an August 1, 1955 blurb recounted the tale of “Mrs. Harry Metcalf,” who “discovered a Negro man hiding behind the sofa in her living room.” “Mrs. Metcalf screamed,” she claimed, before the man “rushed out of hiding, saying ‘I’m not going to hurt you.’” The stories came in cascading waves. In the span of one month came the following: August 4, 1955 (“Big Posse Surrounds Negro in Mitchell County Field”); August 8, 1955 (“19-Year-Old Negro Shot, Killed Here”); August 9, 1955 (“Negro Boy Being Held in Burglary”); August 11, 1955 (“‘Check Artist’ Negro Caught in Albany”)’ August 17, 1955 (“Berserk Negro

---

<sup>16</sup> Michael Chalfen, “Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965,” *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 41.

Knocked Out While Breaking Into House”); August 21, 1955 (“Negro Shot Burglarizing Local Café”); August 23, 1955 (“Negro Burglar Faces 4 Charges”); August 24, 1955 (“Sylvester Bank Robbed; Negro Suspect Held”); August 25, 1955 (“Negro Youth Facing Worth Arson Charge”).<sup>17</sup>

When they weren’t churning out negative portrayals in the *Herald*, whites—particularly those at City Hall—gave the impression that they simply didn’t view African Americans as equals. Throughout the 1950s, black leaders continually came, hat in hand, to present modest requests. The petitions were in no way a threat to Jim Crow, but measures to improve the black community from within. Leaders repeatedly asked for one policeman of their own race to patrol the all-black Harlem neighborhood, requests which were repeatedly denied. In June 1955, the Negro Voters League tried to play on the good will of Mayor Taxi Smith, who had appointed a committee six months earlier “to study and make recommendations on Negro needs.” The request had been presented several times before the city commission, usually by the Negro Voters League, and each time it had been shot down. When pressed, whites had compromised by hiring a black juvenile detention worker, though they fired him a few months later for allegedly running a side business posting bonds for black defendants. This time was no different, except for the context—the shadow of Brown still cloaked the city, turning an unlikely request into

---

<sup>17</sup> “Sumner Negro Arrested Again On Rum Charge,” *Albany Herald*, June 15, 1955; “Negro Man Scares Woman In Home Here,” *Albany Herald*, August 1, 1955; “Big Posse Surrounds Negro In Mitchell County Field,” *Albany Herald*, August 4, 1955; “19-Year-Old Negro Shot, Killed Here,” *Albany Herald*, August 8, 1955; “Negro Boy Being Held In Burglary,” *Albany Herald*, August 9, 1955; “‘Check Artist’ Negro Caught In Albany,” *Albany Herald*, August 11, 1955; “Berserk Negro Knocked Out While Breaking Into House,” *Albany Herald*, August 17, 1955; “Negro Shot Burglarizing Local Cafe,” *Albany Herald*, August 21, 1955; “Negro Burglar Faces 4 Charges,” *Albany Herald*, August 23, 1955; “Sylvester Bank Robbed; Negro Suspect Held,” *Albany Herald*, August 24, 1955; “Negro Youth Facing Worth Arson Charge,” *Albany Herald*, August 25, 1955.



an impossible one for nervous city leaders. The ostensible reason given was a “lack of finances for expansion,” and “other problems concerning organization.” Mayor Pro Tem Frank Barker boiled the opposition down to the root: “I don’t think this is a time for Negro policemen in Albany.”<sup>18</sup>

Albany’s political leaders felt confident enough to scuttle even the most incremental of gains for the black community. They seemed sure, as they often told their audiences, that their treasured separation of the races would endure, no matter what Earl Warren said. In February of 1956, Taxi Smith, fresh off a recent stint as Mayor of Albany, ventured twenty-five miles north to Dawson to present on the issue of “State’s Rights” to a gathering of the local American Legion. Speaking to the men of Davis Daniel Post 133, Smith criticized NAACP officials for “receiving high salaries without regard for the ones they hurt or help.” He then issued a common refrain heard from southwest Georgia’s genteel, moderate white leaders: that recent tensions between the races were unnatural, imported to the South by meddling northern liberals. “Let us highly resolve,” Smith concluded, “that we shall do our utmost to keep the South and America free from petty things which will, if agitated, inevitably destroy us.” Having approved of Smith’s remarks, the Legion members went on to more pressing business, voting unanimously to sponsor the Terrell County High School Band for the next year.<sup>19</sup>

American Legion Halls were small potatoes compared to the big rallies that brought city and rural folk together to denounce integration. On March 11, 1956, 1,500 white spectators congregated on the lawn in front of the Miller County Courthouse in

---

<sup>18</sup> “Local Negroes Asking Policemen Of Own Race,” *Albany Herald*, June 1, 1955.

<sup>19</sup> “Taxi Smith Talks To Legion At Dawson On States’ Rights,” *Albany Herald*, February 12, 1956.

nearby Colquitt, Georgia, to hear a slate of local leaders tell them what they wanted to hear. The square “took on the air of an old-time political rally,” according to Pete Rockett, the *Herald’s* State News Editor, as the crowd encircled the building “to hear a group of speakers challenge them to organize and fight to preserve constitutional government in the United States and racial segregation in the South.” Among the 1,500 listeners were local representatives from over twenty Georgia counties. The men, women, and children listened intently, providing rolling bouts of applause each time a speaker called for defiance. Men of power ascended to the podium. Men like Roy Harris, former Speaker of the Georgia House of Representatives, owner of the *Augusta Chronicle*, and a renowned political “kingmaker.” His ability to place his preferred candidate in office was so heralded that it sparked a popular saying among his peers: “What do you need to be elected governor in Georgia? Fifty thousand dollars and Roy Harris.” On this spring day, he called on the crowd to fight, not with African Americans, but “with present-day carpetbaggers and scalawags,” who were “seeking to tear down our way of life and destroy our constitutional government.”<sup>20</sup>

Next came Albany’s favorite adopted son, James Gray, who brought out the metaphorical red paint, vilifying integrationists as communists and socialists. “The woods of Washington are full of them,” he claimed, “and their ideas are about as American as a glass of vodka.” He continued by pointing out that “the big lie”—“that we don’t want the Negro to progress...that we will keep him bottled up in the slave quarters of our society”—was false. Gray assured the audience that southerners wanted “social justice” for

---

<sup>20</sup> Pete Rockett, “1,500 at Colquitt Urged To Preserve Segregation,” *Albany Herald*, March 11, 1956; Christopher A. Huff, “Roy V. Harris (1895-1985),” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, January 10, 2014, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/roy-v-harris-1895-1985>.

blacks, but, he quipped, “social justice is not social equality.” There were good and bad examples of black advancement, in Grey’s eyes: Booker T. Washington. George Washington Carver. These were men of substance, men who propelled the race forward without upsetting the apple cart. But he decried the oncoming “new Negro” who watched their new hero Autherine Lucy attempt “to force her way into the University of Alabama’s classrooms in a Cadillac.”<sup>21</sup>

Organizers put on the Colquitt rally to whip up support for the States Rights Council, Georgia’s half-hearted version of the White Citizens Council. Created in December 1954 by hardline segregationists in Augusta, the organization promised to use “every legal means” to preserve the “social, political, and economic institutions of our beloved Southland.” Although Georgia’s political establishment lent it verbal support, the States Rights Council never took off. At its peak, the group claimed fewer than 10,000 members. The failure of the States Rights Council testified to Georgia’s unique nature. As historian Neil R. McMillen has noted, “the Peach State stands apart in the history of southern resistance for it alone among the five states of the lower South failed to develop a viable organized segregation movement.” While Georgia may have lacked the organizational framework that coordinated protests in the rest of the Deep South, that does not mean its citizens were any more progressive on the race issue than their neighbors in Mississippi or Alabama, they just opposed integration with a more genteel posture. Of course they would do everything possible to stop *Brown* from becoming a

---

<sup>21</sup> Pete Rockett, “1,500 at Colquitt Urged To Preserve Segregation.”

reality, but most cities conducted their own resistance campaigns, drawing on a statewide political apparatus only when necessary.<sup>22</sup>

Although these backlash campaigns proved temporarily effective, African Americans were not cowed by the increasing volume of massive resistance. They continued petitioning, slowly increasing their demands with each year. A March 14, 1956 article captured the exasperation of white leaders at yet another round of appeals: “Negroes Request Dozens Of City Services,” the headline read. “We solicit your genuine and sympathetic aid,” the petition stated, “in resolving prolonged grievances.” The authors went on to note, with perhaps a tinge of sarcasm, the reason why their previous requests had been ignored, chalking the delay up to “what, we speculatively submit, has been due to administrative neglect....” At the top of the list circulated by the Negro Voters League was a long-standing wish: a black policeman. The rest of their demands painted a stark portrait of a black community lacking many basic city services. Black neighborhoods and streets weren’t adequately lit. Parks in those neighborhoods lacked outdoor drinking fountains and proper lighting. There were no recreation centers for black children to use. Black schools almost never had policemen there to help young students cross the street. The roads to the schools were unpaved, and there were no sidewalks in sight. South Albany, a historically black neighborhood, had no fire station. The list went on. The commissioners “reported favorably on some of the items,” but on the police question, Mayor W.F. McAfee punted, letting his fellow commissioners know

---

<sup>22</sup> Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (University of Illinois Press, 1994), 80–81; Donald Lee Grant, *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (University of Georgia Press, 1993), 378.

“that the only time he would hire a Negro policeman is when the chief of police recommends it.”<sup>23</sup>

Underlying each denial was the contention that, by and large, African Americans could be appeased within the confines of Jim Crow. Albany demanded a certain tone of respect between the races—it was okay to disagree on the pace of change, as long as it was done in a courteous manner. And while the James Grays and Taxi Smiths of Albany did avoid the fire-breathing rhetoric so often seen across the Deep South, they struggled to restrain themselves when threatened with bad national press. On April 3, 1956, their main contention—that segregation was preferred by both races—was challenged by a black army private at Camp Gordon, Georgia, a training center just outside of Augusta.

The incendiary article, titled “Private Foster, U.S.A.” ran on a two-page spread in *Look* Magazine, a photograph-heavy biweekly that competed with *Life* and boasted a circulation of nearly four million. In the article, readers were introduced to Joe Foster, a twenty-five-year-old army private who, up until three years earlier, had lived his entire life in Albany, Georgia, “where a white man is a ‘gentleman’ and a colored man is often just a ‘nigger.’” After enlisting in 1953, however, Joe “entered another world,” where “a man is a man” and “only the first sergeant has a right to think he’s better than the next.” On the base, Joe encountered little resentment, even from southerners. He spent every waking moment around white men, taking part in the mundane cycles of base life—marching, eating, shaving, and cracking jokes during down time. In February 1954, Joe started an 18-month tour of duty abroad. When photographer Bob Lerner from *Look*

---

<sup>23</sup> “Negroes Request Dozens Of City Services,” *Albany Herald*, March 14, 1956.

caught up with him, he had just returned to Camp Gordon for advanced military police training.<sup>24</sup>

The story's layout mirrored the Jekyll and Hyde quality of southern society. On each side of the magazine's binding stood a different life—one integrated, one segregated. On the left, readers watched Joe lounge on his army cot while comparing letters from home with his friend Len Goodbread, a thinly built square-jawed white man from Rochester, New York. Two small inserts provided a glimpse of life on the base, where the ordinary rules of Jim Crow were suspended. In one photo, Joe dines at the cafeteria, a small grin creeping across his face as he listens to a white corporal. "If this were a white civilian restaurant," the caption read, "Joe couldn't even enter it." Looking over, readers saw Joe sitting at the camp bowling alley, chatting with Len while a mixed-race crowd bustles before them. Recreating the same scenes past the fences of Camp Gordon would, of course, be impossible.<sup>25</sup>

Crossing over the magazine's spine, readers were thrust into Albany, which, although only a couple hundred miles from base, "could be a million miles away in terms of human relations." Although his time in the service provided him a brief taste of equality, "in Albany, Joe knows that equality is a word you just don't use." The description that followed presented, in poetic tragedy, Albany as seen through the eyes of a black man:

When he comes home on furlough, Joe Foster enters another world. It's a world of "colored entrance" signs and a pretty little town cut in half by fear, ignorance, and the remains of a dead civilization. A man isn't just a man in Albany. He's either a white man or a colored man, and local rules say that never the twain shall

---

<sup>24</sup> Joe Morschauer and Bob Lerner, "Private Foster, U.S.A.," *Look*, April 3, 1956.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

meet. But Joe isn't bitter about it: "There's troubles here," he says. "But it's my home town and I'm proud of it."

Three photos framed the page. On the bottom left, Joe leans on the side of a taxi, chuckling as he catches up with the driver. The driver's side door reads, in large letters, "HARLEM CABS," and just above it: "Colored Only." On the bottom right, Joe, clad in his uniform, one hand tucked in his pocket, strides toward the local movie theater. Out front stands an advertisement for the latest offering—"Hold Back Tomorrow," a tear-jerker about the last hours of a condemned man—and on the wall directly above: "Colored Entrance." But the largest photo, taking up nearly half the page, shows Joe Foster—tall, broad-shouldered, athletic, handsome, wearing a wool suit with a tucked-in plaid shirt, his fist clenched as his left arm swings forward—all part of a determined march toward the camera. He stares straight ahead with a determined gaze. "This is home," reads the caption, "I don't like segregation, but segregation or not, this is where I want to live."<sup>26</sup>

Whites erupted. Vitriol blanketed the pages of the Albany Herald. Open letters flowed in to *Look* Editor Gardner Cowles, some bearing a tone of polite disagreement, some outright hostility. Always first to respond for the community, James Gray weighed in with a civil rejoinder, accusing Cowles of showing "little respect for Albany's social habits and customs." Gray took particular issue with the charge that his beloved city was "cut in half by fear, ignorance, and the remains of a dead civilization." To dispute the insult, Gray sang the praises of Albany, a booming city that bestowed the dividends of economic growth equally among its citizens. "The last time we looked around," he noted, "our schools were full, our churches were thriving, our population was up some 300 per cent in the last two decades, our civic clubs were markedly active in community

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

endeavors, and, incidentally,” he added, “numerous industries from your neck of the woods were making inquiries about how they could come down and join us.” And yet, simply pointing to the economic scoreboard was not enough. Gray had to insist that “Albany is not psychopathic about the racial question.” “We have not locked the issue away in the closet like a family skeleton,” he claimed, “nor do we spend every hour in the day beating it with a stick like a mangy cur.” Albanians, Gray argued, took a common sense approach to the race question. No one in Albany wished Private Foster ill, he claimed, and furthermore there was nothing stopping a black man from making a successful life for himself in southwest Georgia.<sup>27</sup>

Gray’s readers showered him with praise. “It is with great pride that I take this opportunity to highly commend you on your open letter to Look Magazine in which you very effectively denounced their most unwarranted attack on the city of Albany,” wrote local resident D.H. Powell. C.R. Cox of nearby Clay County also offered his congratulations, adding that “Clay Countians are proud to be represented by a man of your character and strength on racial matters.” Others struck a less civil tone. “The good name and reputation of Albany has been dealt an unprovoked, cowardly, and libelous assault by Look Magazine and its cult of yellow journalists,” said Peter Zack Geer, a former state representative and featured speaker at the Dougherty County States Rights Council. Geer suggested that *Look* should “clean up its own back-yard first,” which he

---

<sup>27</sup> James H. Gray, Jr., “An Open Letter To Look Magazine,” *Albany Herald*, March 20, 1956.



envisioned as a northern urban hellscape dominated by organized crime lords and corrupt ward bosses (*Look* was based in Des Moines, Iowa).<sup>28</sup>

But Albanians weren't satisfied—not only did they need to discredit the message, but the messenger as well. After seeing the *Look* article, *Herald* writers immediately began digging. What they found was evidence of a somewhat troubled youth. In the *Herald's* apocryphal, fly-on-the-wall account, Foster's past resurfaced organically down at the Albany Police Station, where detectives who happened to be thumbing through the pages of *Look* saw a familiar face. "Well, look here!" Captain J.A. McDonald exclaimed, "here's Joe." "Danged if it ain't," said Captain Gordon Stokes, chief of detectives. As a teenager in 1950, Joe Foster allegedly broke into a medical building in Albany several times. What was stolen (if anything) remained a mystery in the report, but if the article was to be believed, Foster was such an accomplished thief that police dubbed him the "Phantom Burglar" due to his slippery nature. Juvenile Court sent the 15-year-old to the Training School for Boys in Milledgeville, Georgia, for 14 months. As for the white community's response to the *Look* article, it was determined that "public comment was ample, but mostly unprintable."<sup>29</sup>

The Foster episode crystallized white discontent over integration and punctured the façade of gentility that Albanians relied on to buttress their defense of segregation. The knee-jerk response from the white community reflected a deep-seeded anxiety over the possibility that perhaps they were wrong; perhaps their black friends and neighbors

---

<sup>28</sup> "People's Forum," *Albany Herald*, March 24, 1956; "People's Forum," *Albany Herald*, March 27, 1956; "Geer Blasts Look Editors, Commy Influence," *Albany Herald*, March 28, 1956.

<sup>29</sup> "Magazine's Albany Negro 'Hero' Served 14 Months For Burglaries," *Albany Herald*, March 20, 1956.

were becoming less like Joseph Holley and more like Joe Foster. This was why they struggled so hard to paint Foster as the other—an outlier, a petty criminal, a toxic element that had been filtered out of the body politic. The smear campaign directed against Joe Foster was pulled from a playbook that would be refined and recycled in the years to follow.

Six days after Joe Foster's profile ran in *Look*, Attorney General Herbert Brownell introduced a new civil rights bill aimed at safeguarding black voting rights. Since Reconstruction, every bill that had anything to do with civil rights had been snuffed out by entrenched southern Democrats determined to preserve the post-Redemption order. The looming '57 bill, however, had legislative virtuoso Lyndon Baines Johnson behind it. Eager to position himself as a centrist for the upcoming 1960 Presidential contest, Johnson worked both sides of the aisle. He promised reluctant southern Democrats that the bill was nothing more than a paper tiger that would effectively kick the civil rights can further down the road. To skeptical liberals and black leaders, Johnson argued that a weak bill was better than no bill at all, and assured them that this was just the first—albeit small—step towards real federal protection of minority rights. He was right on both counts.<sup>30</sup>

Liberals got the Civil Rights Commission (at the time authorized for a two-year fact-finding mission, after which it would cease to exist), the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, and the Attorney General's power to bring voting rights cases in federal court. If all those provisions had passed by themselves, the act would truly have been a remarkable victory for civil rights activists. Passage of the bill, however, required

---

<sup>30</sup> Robert A. Caro, *Master of the Senate* (Vintage Books, 2003), 863–71.

the gutting of its most potent mechanism: the ability of federal judges to convict southerners for refusing their orders. Southern Senators shrewdly pushed through an amendment requiring the right to a jury trial (which in the South meant the right to be heard by an all-white jury) for all federal suits brought under the law.<sup>31</sup>

Whites and blacks had charted the bill's progress back in Albany, with two different sets of opinions about its merits. "The South has had many, many years to deal with the Negro, but it has consistently refused," wrote black Albany resident Ernest Tremane. Responding to a slew of editorials from white authors proclaiming that African Americans didn't want the bill, Tremane argued that "no impression of what the Negro wants or thinks, in truth, can be advanced unless the artificial barriers created by economic, legal and physical pressures are dispelled." Without the vote, Tremane implied, blacks would always, to some degree, be forced to perform for whites. The idea didn't sit well with white Albanians, who crowed with delight when the jury trial amendment passed in August of 1957. James Gray called it "A Victory for Tolerance," a triumph over self-righteous liberals "perfectly willing to flog the racial issue daily with political whips to the point that the rights of individuals were in danger of serious abuse." Letters of praise again flowed forth in response. "I want to thank you in my own humble way," local resident H.W. Vickers said, "for your stand on this horrible civil rights issue." Albanian Hiram Clegg offered his hearty congratulations for Gray's "superb editorials," adding that, "We of Albany, are most fortunate to have an editor of your caliber—not to mention all the other highly worthwhile things you do for this section of the country."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 944–89.

Whites could breathe a sigh of relief knowing that for the moment, Richard B. Russell and the rest of the southern caucus had neutered the '57 Civil Rights Act. After all, the law was distant, something crafted in the faraway halls of Washington to silence the increasing demands for action from misguided do-gooders. One month later though, the crisis brewing in Little Rock, Arkansas, exploded onto the national scene, forcing Albanians to reckon with a new reality—that the federal government itself had invaded the South to force black students into their schools. The response was predictable, and it came from all corners of Albany. “This is awful,” one resident said off the record, “I never thought I would see federal troops sent to schools in America.” In almost prophetic terms, State Senator Asa Kelley weighed in. Kelley—a well-respected war veteran, former State commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), vice chairman of the VFW’s National Legislative Committee and a captain of the Marine Corps Reserve—would soon become Mayor of Albany, presiding over the city’s massive resistance strategy during the high tide of mass protests in 1961. For now, he deemed President Eisenhower’s decision to send troops to Little Rock as “the greatest catastrophe this country has ever sustained.” White parents reacted in different ways, though most seemed to be determined to “take whatever steps necessary, without hesitation, to keep their children out of integrated schools.” “Some said they didn’t think they problem will come to Georgia in the near future,” the article noted, “while others declared they think the crisis ‘at home’ will be coming soon.”<sup>32</sup>

It came sooner than anticipated. In the early morning hours of September 27, 1957—one day after Albany had digested the Little Rock news—the campus of Albany

---

<sup>32</sup> Don Kimsey, “Albanians Bitterly Denounce Ike Move,” *Albany Herald*, September 26, 1957.

State College went up in flames. Firemen received the call at 3 a.m., when they rushed to find the Hazard Training School—an elementary school with an enrollment of 250 black students—engulfed in fire. Upon arriving at Hazard, firemen knew it was already a lost cause—every inch of the one-story brick veneer grammar school was ablaze. Still, they dutifully laid thousands of feet of hose and called every able-bodied fireman to the scene. As they fought to save the doomed building, a light rain began to fall, but not enough to put out the fire. At 5:15 a.m., after over two hours of battling the Hazard School fire, pump operators looked across the street to see a sudden flash and then a piercing orange glow as flames began licking out of Caroline Hall, an auditorium whose corridors housed several administrative offices. One fireman ran over and quickly attached two lines to the hydrant out front. Firemen carried the first hose into the north side of the auditorium, where they found the main fire raging across the stage. The second hose was taken into the balcony, where its operators looked down at the scene playing out below. Caroline Hall was saved, although Fire Chief E.E. Moody noted that “another few minutes would have been too late.”<sup>33</sup>

Around 8 a.m., exhausted firemen were still pouring water on a smoking pile of ruins that used to be the Hazard School when they noticed several young black scholars walking up; they hadn’t been told the news. “They stood,” according to one report, “mute and bewildered, watching firemen douse the dying remains of the fire.” Teachers arrived in their cars, only to be turned around as well; there would be no work today. After the

---

<sup>33</sup> E.E. Moody to National Fire Protection Association, October 1, 1957, 33/21/216, Folder 4, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA; Vic Smith, “Fire Levels Negro School, Damages College Unit Here,” *Albany Herald*, September 27, 1957; “\$300,000 Fire Levels Albany Negro College,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 28, 1957.

smoke finally began to clear, investigators walking through the charred remnants of Caroline Hall found an eerie scene. The lock on the back door had been ripped off and the door had been forced open. Inside, broken glass covered the floor. The entire balcony—its seats, walls, doors, and ceiling, which stood 100 feet from the fire’s center—were singed. Windows at the back of the auditorium had cracked from the extreme heat. The stage—where the fire had started—had been completely destroyed. An expensive grand piano had been burned through, and the rest of the stage had been blackened. But in the center of it all was a Bible—“water soaked and seared...opened to the Book of Solomon.”<sup>34</sup>

What followed was at best lazy policing and at worst a blatant cover-up. All the initial reports suggested arson. The Fire Chief himself, E.E. Moody, stated unequivocally “there is no doubt that the fire at the assembly hall was of incendiary origin, and I believe the first one was too.” Beyond the broken back door with its jimmied lock and the strangely-placed Bible, officials investigating the stage at Caroline Hall saw that gasoline had been poured around the stage and lit. Adding to the evidence was the flash nature of the fire. One of the fireman who first noticed the blaze, P.W. Peterson, was looking right at the building when “it seemed to flare up all at once.”<sup>35</sup>

When it came to pinpointing suspects, differing reports began to surface. The first came from two firemen who saw a blond white man weighing about 175 pounds, wearing a red-checked sports shirt and brown pants, running out of the burning Caroline Hall. City Detective W.M. Harris noted that there were white teenagers at the scene, though he suspected they were merely spectators “attracted by the early morning blaze.” Harris

---

<sup>34</sup> Vic Smith, “Fire Levels Negro School, Damages College Unit Here.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

didn't provide any more detail about the youths, except to say that "officers intended to check out the identity of the white persons and ask them how they came to be at the fire," although there was no indication those conversations ever took place. Another fireman seemed to corroborate Harris's story when he told reporters that he had spoken with "a group of white youths 17 or 18 years old" shortly after arriving to find the burning Hazard School. The group then walked off as the fireman watched them "going toward the administration building just before the flames broke out in it." In a conflicting account, however, Fireman P.W. Peterson claimed he also saw three men running from a flaming building, but in his story, they were black. Local authorities immediately realized the stakes of the investigation—if whites had torched the buildings, it meant the end of Albany's reputation as a harmonious segregated community. "If the fire was the work of an arsonist, it was a stupid act," said Donald Wakeford, chairman of the City Police Committee. He added—somewhat defensively—that "race relations have been good and we want to keep them good and not let some hoodlum or criminal disturb peace and amity in this good community."<sup>36</sup>

Before the smoke had even cleared from the hilltop campus, investigators began carving out some wiggle room from their original statements to suggest that perhaps the fires had been an act of God. The word "if" became more prevalent. "We will do everything in our power to help in bringing to justice the guilty parties," Sheriff D.C. Campbell promised, "if anyone is guilty of arson." When news of the fire reached the governor's mansion, Marvin Griffin offered his tepid condolences, noting that "if the fire was set by irresponsible hands, it is certainly regrettable." He then declined to send state

---

<sup>36</sup> Smith, "Fire Levels Negro School"; "\$300,000 Fire Levels Albany Negro College."

investigators to the scene. The one thing they all agreed on, however, was that race played no part in the fire. James Gray called the fire “a deranged doing of a person or persons who possess no emotional stability.” Although he considered the fire “regrettable,” he found it more regrettable that some distant journalists had played up the race angle. “Our indignation boils over,” Gray fumed, “at this unreasoning affront to Albany’s integrity and decency.” William H. Dennis, who replaced the more militant Aaron Brown as President of Albany State in 1953, claimed “there is absolutely no evidence of, or reason to believe there might have been any racialism involved.” Detective Harris agreed, and offered his own alternative theories, proposing that “it could have been three or four young Negroes who had been having some trouble with the college and set the fire in revenge.” “Or,” he speculated, “with all the talk about integration, it could have been Negroes trying to gain an advantage in this argument.” Having established those caveats, the vigorous inquiry began. Sheriff Campbell dispatched two deputies, instructing them to “stay on the job until you exhaust every possible lead and run down every clue that might help in apprehending the persons responsible for this.”<sup>37</sup>

The investigation lasted one week. Although detectives initially questioned one suspect, they cut him loose after witnesses said he wasn’t the man. On October 4, 1957, the final report on the Caroline Hall fire was released. Though only one page, it identified an unlikely culprit: light bulbs. Without acknowledging the mountain of evidence

---

<sup>37</sup> Vic Smith, “Fire Levels Negro School, Damages College Unit Here”; “Arson Indicated In Albany Blaze, Probers Report,” *Moultrie Observer*, September 28, 1957; “\$300,000 Fire Hits Albany Negro College,” *Tifton Gazette*, September 27, 1957; “Albany College For Negroes Ripped By \$300,000 Blaze,” *Moultrie Observer*, September 27, 1957; James H. Gray, Jr., “An Insult To Albany,” *Albany Herald*, September 28, 1957.



suggesting arson—the busted door, the tampered lock, the broken glass, the flash, the gasoline, the multiple witness accounts of persons fleeing the building, and the curious timing of the blaze coming on the heels of the most drastic step yet taken towards school integration—Albany’s finest concluded that someone had left the stage lights on overnight, and that those bulbs slow-cooked the nearby stage curtains until they burst into flames.<sup>38</sup>

Detectives were saved from having to explain the Hazard School fire since any clues were melted down into a heaping pile of soot. They didn’t even venture a guess as to why the building burned. Speaking to the *Albany Journal*—a small-time local competitor to the *Herald*—one official put it in gambler’s terms, claiming that the fire was just “one of those 1000 to one shots,” though, as the *Journal* article quipped, “he failed to provide odds on a similar accidental fire breaking out across the street at the same time.” Perhaps the most powerful voice of reason came from an unsigned editorial published in the *Journal* on the day the report was released. Its author lampooned the recent investigation as little more than a cover-up:

One would have to be incredibly naïve to accept the convenient theory that racial strife played no part in the mysterious twin blazes at the Negro college. We too would like to shield Albany from the glare of unfavorable publicity, but alas and alack, the news of the conflagration at the Negro college has spread far and wide in the breadth of this great land of ours and even across the seas, despite the front page exhortation of Mr. James H. Gray of the Albany Herald, to cease and desist from such unfavorable and unfair dissemination of news. We should like nothing better than to appease the conscience of the good citizens of Albany by declaring

---

<sup>38</sup> D.M. Arrington to E.E. Moody, October 4, 1957, 33/21/216, Folder 4, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA.

both fires to be completely accidental, but in the interests of truth we must ask for further conclusive evidence that neither fire was of incendiary origin before Albany can be given a clean bill of health. For if the fire was planned and set, the arsonist must not go unidentified and unpunished. To do so would only lend credibility to the tall tales told by Northerners of the deficiency of justice in the South.

Despite these limited appeals to reason and common sense, no one would be brought to justice for the fires.<sup>39</sup>

For Albany's African American community, the twilight of the 1950s brought few changes outside of the ballot box, and even there improvements came at a glacial rate. Black civic organizations kept up their petitioning. In 1957, the Criterion Club—a group of wealthy black men founded in 1947—sent a small delegation to ask the city commission for improvements to the ailing infrastructure of the all-black Lincoln Heights neighborhood. The Negro Voters League continued its work—slowly, laboriously adding black names to the voter rolls. By 1958, 18.9 percent of Albany's 14,163 eligible black voters were registered and black voters came to occupy a meaningful portion of the Albany electorate. In a special mayoral election in August 1958, 1,423 African Americans made their way to the Municipal Auditorium—their assigned, segregated polling place—and voted. Reports from early balloting noted that black women outnumbered black men at the polls “by approximately two to one.” As a whole, African

---

<sup>39</sup> “Negro College Fire Called ‘Accidental,’” *Albany Journal*, October 4, 1957, 33/21/216, Folder 4, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA; “Burning of the College,” *Albany Journal*, October 4, 1957, 33/21/216, Folder 4, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Morrow, GA.

Americans constituted 23 percent of the overall tally that day, and cast 65 percent of their ballots in favor of Jim Porter Watkins, who cruised to the largest landslide victory in the history of Albany mayoral elections. One year later, 1,389 African Americans—27 percent of the day’s total—voted in the city’s Democratic primary. The vote within the black community for Mayor Pro Tem was split almost down the middle—669 to 542. The loser, Fred Mills, came up short by 662 votes. Had he swept the black vote, he would have won.<sup>40</sup>

Whites seemed to tolerate the gradual expansion of the black electorate. After each contest, the *Herald* printed the “Negro” vote totals with all the indifference and clinical precision of a weather report. After all, African Americans made up only a fraction of the votes counted, and only mattered when the margins were razor-thin. What they did worry about, however, was the NAACP. The organization had always been unpopular, of course, but after the *Brown* decision, whites fixated on the NAACP, identifying it as the wellspring from which all racial agitation flowed. The state of Georgia joined the rest of the Deep South in targeting the group, but in Albany, most whites had little idea what the local chapter was up to. “Just how active is the NAACP in Albany?” was the question posed in a February 1959 *Herald* profile, the first in a five-part investigation of race relations in the area. “The organization is here,” the report noted, “but how many members it has and what they are doing, if anything, is not known even by many of the leading Negro citizens of this community.”<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Vic Smith, “Dougherty, Area Voters Swarm to Ballot Boxes,” *Albany Herald*, September 10, 1958; Jimmy Robinson, “Slappey, Chandler Cop Easy Wins; Johnston Squeaks In,” *Albany Herald*, September 29, 1960.

<sup>41</sup> Vic Smith and Don Kimsey, “NAACP in Albany, But Relatively Few Know Its Activities,” *Albany Herald*, February 13, 1959.

Recent events had made whites more suspicious of the NAACP. C.B. King, the only black attorney in southwest Georgia, had recently defended a black school janitor accused of molesting a child. King requested the charges be dropped because the juries that indicted and convicted the man were all white. Observers shrieked over the incident, circulating rumors that perhaps C.B.'s defense was ordered by his father, C.W. King, a founding member of the local NAACP. Furthermore, there were grumblings that the gambit was an opening attempt at stirring up "an integration controversy." The young lawyer denied the accusations, claiming he only presented the motion to provide his client with the best defense possible. On top of the jury controversy, there had been a series of meetings in the past two weeks "concerning an alleged case of 'police brutality' involving a 15-year-old Negro boy" that "caused a tremendous stir among City officials, the police department, and in other quarters."<sup>42</sup>

The intense stigma attached to the NAACP was underscored by C.W. King himself, who gave an interview that portrayed the organization as a hollowed out shell of its former self. "I'll bet they haven't had three meetings in two years," the aging patriarch confessed. King—perhaps to prevent racial violence—minimized the discontent festering within the black community, as well as any desires blacks may have had to live in an integrated world. "I believe that if the doors of every white school in Albany were opened for the admission of Negroes, not a single Negro child would show up to attend, unless some outside influence pushed the child's parents into it," he claimed. To further assuage white fears, he described being approached years earlier by a white man wanting to mount an desegregation suit, a project he'd refused to take part in. "I told them I didn't

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

think it was the time nor the place for anything like that,” King said. “And I still don’t.” To hear King tell it, blacks had little to complain about, and were proud of their hometown. They did feel, however, that whites were too hesitant to discipline those who mistreated blacks. “They feel like the white folks regret it as much as we do when there might be a case of police brutality or other abuse of a Negro,” King confessed, “but they are too reluctant to do anything about it.” He qualified that lone objection though, claiming that any such resentment was “a normal reaction of any citizenry, and has nothing to do with the NAACP, integration, or anything of the like.” King’s interview placated the Herald reporters, who described in terms that the white community could accept: “a level-thinker and a man of strong convictions and opinions, and one who does not attempt to flout them.” Taken as a whole, the article presented a summary of the local NAACP that was sure to soothe the fears of white readers: “Negroes in Albany are not pushing integration in any way, the NAACP is not active here and local Negroes desire nothing more than peaceful co-existence with their white friends.” “You might as well face it,” King concluded, “you white folks are going to have to put up with us Negroes for a long time.”<sup>43</sup>

While King’s ingratiating manner may have helped, white Albanians still saw their beloved city as a prime strike zone for potential agitators. When asked about the future of Albany, Governor Ernest Vandiver noted that its explosive economic growth and quality of life made it a likely “target city” for integrationist missions. He didn’t worry though, since “Albany and this section has some of the state’s outstanding men and women.” *Herald* reporters Don Kimsey and Vic Smith agreed, claiming that thankfully,

---

<sup>43</sup> Vic Smith and Don Kimsey, “Negroes Are Happy Outsiders Don’t Meddle, King States,” *Albany Herald*, February 14, 1959.

“not much of a foothold has been gained.” “But,” they warned, “it could happen.” As they argued, the main beneficiary of a successful integration campaign would be the Reds. “It could result,” they claimed, “in some fat Communists, over a bottle of vodka, chuckling in their drink.”<sup>44</sup>

Notions of conspiracy laced each *Herald* report, as writers stoked increasing levels of paranoia with their scaremongering. “Today in Albany the plot is growing,” Smith and Kimsey cautioned. To prove their case, they re-litigated old racial conflicts in the city, noting in each instance how the white community had deftly circumvented disaster. As for the Joe Foster-*Look* Magazine story: “the cold truth is that this person was ‘hired’ for a job against Albany.” As for the rumors of arson at Albany State: “another in a harassing series of attempts to make race-baiting material out of next to nothing.” As for the recent cross-burning at the black Catholic church: it “might have been done by Negroes,” and it might have had “no racial significance at all.” As for the recent incident of police brutality involving the 15-year-old black boy: “A federal agent, sent here to investigate...quickly folded his briefcase and left the city when he learned the truth. It was a ‘put up’ job.” “Outside agents” kept trying to infiltrate Albany, the writers claimed, only to find that “the pickings were lean.” Summarizing the state of affairs in 1959, the organ of white sentiment in Albany declared victory over the waves of outside forces preying on the minds of local blacks: “Intelligent, local action met the challenge—

---

<sup>44</sup> Don Kimsey and Vic Smith, “Radical Elements Baffled in State, Ernie Tells Herald,” *Albany Herald*, February 15, 1959; Don Kimsey and Vic Smith, “Russell, Talmadge Warning Also Fits Into Albany Picture,” *Albany Herald*, February 12, 1959.

and won. But the battle—with outside forces ever ready to hammer at the door—is far from over.”<sup>45</sup>

By the close of the decade, it became clear African Americans had earned the right to be listened to, but not the right to be taken seriously. Local white men with an eye for public service were forced to acknowledge their petitions, but the rigid constraints of ingrained racism and tradition precluded any real steps towards addressing the concerns of their black neighbors. That does not mean that white Albanians actually believed segregation would last forever. Their frenetic defense of the institution belied that fact. Consider the mental gymnastics required: throughout the 1950s, white men and women had to portray themselves as a friend to African Americans while embracing a commitment to massive resistance bordering on paranoia. Segregation became not just a way of life, but an obsession that exacted a sizeable mental toll not only on its victims, but on its perpetrators as well. And it may very well be that the Hamilton Jordans of southwest Georgia really didn't see the warning signs, or care, and African Americans—for the time being—seemed willing to wait, willing to be patient until the day came when black petitions would be given the same consideration as white petitions. But as they would discover, the quickening march of the civil rights movement, with all its youthful vigor and aggression, would soon dissolve the patience of the black community.

---

<sup>45</sup> Don Kimsey and Vic Smith, “Citizens in Albany, Generally, Easily Spot Troublemakers,” *Albany Herald*, February 17, 1959.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### “DO YOU WANT TO BE FREE?”: THE CLASSICAL PHASE OF THE ALBANY MOVEMENT

“I don’t know when my awareness started, but each experience renewed within me the experience that had come before. Over the years there was an accumulation...Other things started to come into focus, such as segregated water fountains that had been there all the while, but all of a sudden, as I was in high school, these things were becoming more and more a target in my eyes.” Janie Culbreth Rambeau, writing nearly fifty years after her involvement as a young student activist, encapsulated the life force behind the struggle to tear down separate-but-equal in southwest Georgia. The Albany Movement was a *youth* movement. It was the spilling forth of teenage energy that flowed from local black schools, street corners, and hangouts. It was a moment of decision, made by Albany’s black baby boomers, that they would no longer imbibe the humiliation of living in a segregated world. It was, at its heart, a nascent generation of dreamers pushing their elders to confront their demons head-on.<sup>1</sup>

For a brief moment in time—the ten months from November 1961 to August 1962—a diverse group of black and white activists mounted a full-scale attack on segregation, economic inequality, police brutality, and voter discrimination in Southwest Georgia. The movement recruited poor and middle-class blacks. Taxi drivers, maids, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Faith S. Holsaert (ed.), *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (University of Illinois Press, 2010), 92–93.



garbage men marched in the streets alongside school teachers, store owners, and preachers, drawing strength from one another to endure the putrid conditions of the overcrowded county jails. The Albany Movement made consistent headlines in the nation's top newspapers, and films of mass marches were featured nightly on local and national news programs. And yet, despite such immense forward momentum, in just under a year the syndicated columnists had left and the cameras stopped rolling in Albany.

For decades afterward, historians and casual observers alike attributed the Albany Movement's decline to the swift departure of Martin Luther King, Jr., whose presence had brought both notoriety and controversy to the movement. While many local residents were taken in by King's fame and charm, others found him pompous, arrogant—an outsider coming in to take credit for victories that sprang from a grassroots movement culture formed through organizing efforts spanning back decades. When SNCC and NAACP leaders were not criticizing King, they were fighting each other, jostling for control of the newborn coordinating body—the self-titled “Albany Movement”—before it even had a chance to settle on a concrete set of goals or course of action. When the dust settled after SCLC pulled up stakes in late 1962, there stood an intransigent city commission determined to ignore the demands of the black community.

Not found in most scholarly treatments is an accurate explanation of *who* started the Albany Movement and *why*. In all but a few accounts, the formation of the Albany Movement on November 17, 1961, almost materializes out of thin air. While most pay lip service to the contributions of the youths of Albany, for the most part, the story of the Albany Movement has been the story of a small group of black professionals leading a

broad coalition of activists into the streets. But those same black professionals had been in Albany for decades, and throughout that time they'd never embraced the aggressive, in-your-face style that would become synonymous with the Albany Movement. These parents—who'd grown up under the thumb of Southwest Georgia's particularly brutal Jim Crow regime—did not start the Albany Movement. Instead it was their children who—unmoored from their parents' painful memories of lynchings, beatings, and economic repression—forced the Albany Movement into existence. To really grasp the origins of the first citywide, direct-action, total desegregation campaign of the civil rights movement, one must first understand what *Jet* magazine called "Albany's Explosive Generation."<sup>2</sup>

For the black youths of Albany coming of age in the 1950s, it started with a sense that they were somehow different. Janie Culbreath Rambeau sensed it when she stepped on the bus as a young child. It was a special occasion—she was heading downtown to buy some new shoes. Intoxicated with excitement, she "just sat down." Her mother quickly grabbed her by the arm and led her to the back of the bus. She sensed it again in elementary school when she went on her first school picnic in Tift Park. Naturally, she and her friends took off toward the swing sets only to be greeted with the strap from their teacher, who imparted a lesson Janie would never forget: "You colored children got to learn to stay in your place."<sup>3</sup>

Annette Jones White sensed it at four years old when her mother took her downtown to the Belk-Smith department store to buy some shoes. It was Annette's first time downtown, the first time she'd ever been outside a three-block radius in any direction from her neighborhood. As she made the walk on this beautiful, sunny day, she absorbed

---

<sup>2</sup> "Albany's Explosive Generation," *Jet*, September 6, 1962, 24-26.

<sup>3</sup> Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 2010, 92.

everything—the sound of the concrete against her feet (a new sensation because the streets in her neighborhood were unpaved), the storefronts of the black businesses, and the mouthwatering aroma coming from the local hot dog shop. Walking into the department store, she was overwhelmed by the pleasant smells and the rows of chairs occupied by white women and cardboard shoe boxes. All but a few seats were already taken, but even though there were open chairs, Annette’s mother Delores—pregnant at the time—would not sit down. As they stood, waiting patiently, a clerk came up and asked, “Can I help you, girl?” “I want some new shoes!” Annette enthusiastically responded. The clerk ignored Annette and repeated herself: “Can I help you, girl?” It was then that she realized the clerk had been talking to her mother, not her. After finding a pair of Mary Jane’s for Annette, her mother dutifully waited until all the white customers had been taken care of and paid for the shoes. At that point, Annette had to go to the bathroom, and it could not wait. Delores asked the clerk if she could use the restroom. “She’s gonna have to hold it,” the clerk declared, “because the bathroom is for whites.” And so her mother grabbed Annette’s hand and bolted out of the store, racing to make it to Union Dry Cleaners, the closest black business downtown. As they ran, the store came within eyesight, but by then it was too late, and Annette urinated on herself. She did so in full view of a group of white parents and their children, who all laughed at her misfortune. Struggling to make sense of the situation, she realized, at that very moment, the difference—they were white, and she was black. She would never forget, and she never wanted to go downtown again. After that, her mother would trace the outlines of Annette’s feet on paper and shop for shoes without her.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Holsaert, 101; Interview with Annette Jones White, Part I, ASU Civil Rights

In December of the same year, Annette felt the sharp pain of racial discrimination again. Despite her trepidation, she accompanied her father downtown to buy some glue for a construction project. He was always working, so she leapt at any chance to spend time with him. While shopping, Annette noticed that Santa Claus was in the store, and like many children, she begged her father repeatedly until he agreed to take her over to Saint Nick. Annette walked over and got in line behind three white children. “When it came time for me to go I had my smile ready,” Annette recalled, “and I had been good and I was just standing there beaming, waiting for him to lift me up.” But he didn’t. Instead, Santa reached around and picked up the white child standing behind her. As he finished with that child, he reached around again, and again, as Annette stood there, left to puzzle why Santa was ignoring her. “The lights seemed to get brighter, and I got hot, and I felt like I was shrinking, and I just stood there, I couldn’t move.” Her father finally noticed and grabbed her hand, leading her out of the store while he struggled to assure her that the man she’d just seen wasn’t the real Santa, just one of his helpers. Annette cried all the way home, thinking she wasn’t going to get anything for Christmas. Those two events marked a watershed moment for Annette, who realized that “there was a way the people in my neighborhood acted and the white people acted.” “Although I could not name the emotions at that age,” Annette remembered, “resentment and anger stirred in me with each such incident.”<sup>5</sup>

For Brenda Darton Jones, the moment of realization came in high school, when she and a lighter-skinned girlfriend went to apply for work at a local restaurant. The

---

Celebration, Albany, Georgia, August 22, 2011,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c923fh3KQwo>.

<sup>5</sup> Annette Jones White Pt. I; Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 102.

manager offered her friend a waitressing job on the spot. Brenda, however, was offered a dishwashing position. She turned it down and left. “That hurt,” Brenda remembered, “because I had sense enough to know what it was about... ‘Black, you stand back.’” For Donchester Johnson, reminders of his racial difference came every day as he walked past the gleaming white elementary school, each time asking his mother why he couldn’t go there. In Junior High, he noticed the hand-me-down textbooks with their worn spines and outdated content. And on most walks to and from school, he remembered white children passing by in their school buses, spitting and hurling insults. Lula George felt different when she saw the separate doors at the doctor's office. She felt humiliated going to clothing stores and not being able to try any items on. For Andrew Reid, he felt a new anger welling up inside him after his brother returned from the store with a broken jaw he'd received at the hands of several white boys.<sup>6</sup>

What began as moments of curiosity at the profound cruelty of Jim Crow festered into outright resentment among black baby boomers. That resentment pushed each teenager closer to the brink of outright defiance. In many ways, hatred drove them. For all the talk of loving one’s enemy that would drive the nonviolent spirit of later movements, the reality was that many of Albany’s black teenagers came to despise whites. Alton Moultrie’s attitude towards whites changed after seeing Emmett Till’s

---

<sup>6</sup> Brenda Darton Jones, interview by Racquel Henry, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Georgia, June 30, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5as3gUgox1w>; Donchester Johnson, interview by Racquel Henry, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Georgia, May 5, 2011, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71iLcRw8\\_xw&t=5s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71iLcRw8_xw&t=5s); Lula George, interview by Racquel Henry, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Ga., March 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3BpF33YDVA>; Andrew Reid, interview by Racquel Henry, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Ga, April 21, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IbT4T6axI8Q>.

grotesque corpse in the pages of *Jet* Magazine in 1955. “I was just completely upset,” he recalled, “...and I became very, very bitter towards white folk.” Looking back, Andrew Williams pinpointed the verbal abuse doled out to his father as a turning point. “My father,” he recalled, “had worked too hard...and it just always bugged me to see the lack of respect that he received. That got under my skin.” Seeing “snotty-nosed little white boys saying ‘boy,’ or ‘uncle,’ it just did not sit well” with Williams. Witnessing these moments of disrespect provoked “a great deal of resentment” within Williams. “Just telling you the truth,” he admitted, “I didn’t like white folk.” For Brenda Darten Jones, the total accumulation of mistreatment over the years tarnished her image of whites. “As I grew older,” Darten remembered, “I started disliking white people. I just—I hated them.” Others, like Annette Jones White, couldn’t quite embrace a pure hatred of whites, but certainly sensed a changing of their perception. “Well, it wasn’t bitterness...I didn’t understand it,” White said, “I would feel a lump in my throat...that lump—it just became a permanent thing when something would happen, I would feel this lump.”<sup>7</sup>

As they transitioned from adolescents into young adults, they began—in small but important ways—to channel their anger into action by testing and stretching the limits of Jim Crow. “As I got older,” Annette Jones White recalled, “these kinds of incidents made me determined to try to change things.” As a teenager, White made a point to drink from every “white” water fountain she came across. Each time she did so, she would pause and smile at disapproving white onlookers. As she recalled, it was the smile that enraged

---

<sup>7</sup> Alton Moultrie, interview by Racquel Henry, Pt. I, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Georgia, May 25, 2011, <https://youtu.be/Qf1Y2CjtKC8>; Andrew Williams, interview by Racquel Henry, Pt. I, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Georgia, October 4, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ws8DF-eOBfk>; Brenda Darten Jones, interview by Racquel Henry, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Georgia; Annette Jones White Pt. I.

whites the most. Janie Culbreth Rambeau also got into the habit of drinking from the white fountains downtown. The main target became the local five-and-dime, where she and her friends would sip the forbidden water, responding to objections from passers-by with the same retort: "I don't like colored water." As a high-schooler, Rambeau became even more brazen. Every Saturday she would return to the five-and-dime to buy a week's worth of Apple Sun Cured Tobacco for her mother. The sales clerk there was particularly cold towards black customers, always making them wait until any whites were served, always making sure to never touch their hands, and brusquely shoving their change and merchandise across the counter. Finally it became too much for Rambeau, so she methodically counted out, in exact change, the number of pennies needed to buy her mother's tobacco. Concealing a tin can full of pennies, she asked the clerk for her usual order. When, expectedly, the clerk shoved the bag in her direction, Rambeau reared back, and with all her might, hurled the can forward. Pennies rained over the front counter and Rambeau took off, out the back door and through the alley, somehow escaping without being arrested.<sup>8</sup>

The rising spirit among Albany's black teenagers was not lost on their elders, who scrambled to harness their growing energy. An impromptu act of defiance in 1959 marked a new era of direct-action protest, one that would lead inexorably to the larger upheavals two years later. It began at the old Albany Theater, where a group of black Monroe High students went to see the latest Sidney Poitier picture. The theater was particularly busy on this Sunday afternoon as an unusually large crowd of white patrons packed the downstairs area reserved for them by custom. As the lower bowl filled to

---

<sup>8</sup> *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 101, 92–93.

capacity, whites marched up to the balcony, which, also by custom, was reserved for black patrons. Considering it their right, the overflowing white crowd asked the black students to give up their seats. “No,” they responded, “we’re not going to get up and give y’all our seats. We’re up here in our place.” Indignant at this breach of protocol, the white group complained to the manager, who ordered the Monroe kids to leave. Hesitant to push the issue any further (and end up in jail, or worse), the students agreed to leave in exchange for a refund.<sup>9</sup>

A series of handoffs ensued. The students went to their principal, Professor Herd, and recounted the whole story. Herd sent them to Reverend M.F. Adams, a local Presbyterian minister and President of the stagnant local NAACP chapter. After hearing their tale, Adams replied, “Well, there’s a young man in town, he hadn’t been here too long. I think he’s the right man for y’all to go see.” He sent them to Tom Chatmon, a young man in his early thirties armed with a Morehouse degree, an astute business sense, and a compulsive gambling habit. He was gregarious, popular within the local black establishment, and possessed a sharp sense of humor and a willingness to take risks. Chatmon had worked his way up from a hardscrabble rural childhood in nearby Broxton, Georgia and got involved in the NAACP during his freshman year at Morehouse. When he returned to southwest Georgia in the 1950s, he found little movement activity in Albany but felt a palpable sense of racial tension. Chatmon “knew pretty soon something

---

<sup>9</sup> William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad, eds., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* (New Press, 2014), 288–89; Interview with Thomas Chatmon, Sr., June 23, 1994, Behind the Veil Series, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. William H. Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad, eds., *Remembering Jim Crow: African Americans Tell About Life in the Segregated South* (New Press, 2014), 288–89; Thomas Chatmon, Sr., June 23, 1994, Behind the Veil Series, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.



was going to happen." The students arrived at his store the next Monday morning and once again, told their story. Chatmon suggested they organize an NAACP Youth Council and the students—ready to sign up for almost anything—quickly agreed.<sup>10</sup>

After clearing it with the NAACP brass in Atlanta, the group received a charter and began raising money by putting on "Freedom Dances." Chatmon made a sweetheart deal with a local nightclub owner—he'd let them use the space rent-free, and in exchange he'd make a killing by selling concessions to the students. Every Friday night, black teenagers packed out the local club, each one paying a small fee that went into the Youth Council treasury. Two weeks after its formation, the Council boasted 247 members recruited primarily from Albany State College. Brimming with energy, the students began quenching their thirst for real protest. They started by approaching the white owner of a local drugstore, pressuring him to hire one black clerk. He refused. "We failed," Annette Jones White remembered, "but I felt that it was a good start."<sup>11</sup>

That same fall in 1959, White and two classmates conducted the first direct-action protest in Albany. On a whim, they went to the Arctic Bear, a popular walk-up fast food joint with a large neon sign out front of a large polar bear licking an even-larger vanilla ice cream cone. The owner had laid down a set of dining rules everyone understood: blacks and whites ordered from separate windows, whites were welcome to eat on the wooden tables out front or in their parked cars, but blacks were expected to take their food elsewhere. On this particular day, however, Annette and her two "reluctant" friends

---

<sup>10</sup> Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad, *Remembering Jim Crow*, 289; Thomas Chatmon, Sr., *Behind the Veil*.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 525–26; Annette Jones White, "Freedom Movement Narrative of Annette Jones White," 2013, <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/whiteaj.htm>.

got their food, walked over, and calmly sat down at a table. White patrons began eyeballing them. After a little while, the manager approached. “I’m sorry, but you all are gonna have to leave,” he said. “I appreciate your business, but we don’t get enough business from y’all for me to upset my regular customers.” Annette politely responded, “okay,” and the manager walked off. As her friends began to pack up, Annette stopped them. “We are not going anywhere,” she declared. In full view of the leering manager and his dismayed customers, the women finished their meals. They had successfully called the manager’s bluff—though he and everyone else continued to stare, no one called the cops that day. The unrehearsed sit-in must have stunned white witnesses. It also added to the constellation of defiant acts perpetrated by Albany’s nascent black generation. Black teens were developing a political consciousness before whites’ very eyes. It may not have seemed like much of a threat to white onlookers at the time, but it was *abnormal*, and that irregular behavior poked holes in the fabric of segregation. If black folk were so happy with the status quo, then what explained these increasing manifestations of resistance? As modest as these spontaneous projects seemed, they implanted a new sense of purpose and community in the young activists. “I felt uplifted,” White beamed, “about being around people who wanted to do something to make a difference in all of our lives.”<sup>12</sup>

As autumn gave way to a frigid winter and a new decade dawned, a swirl of events gave new meaning and urgency to the embryonic student movement in Albany.

---

<sup>12</sup> Annette Jones-White, interview by Dorrie Brooks in Albany, Georgia, January 14, 2007, Albany Civil Rights Institute, Albany, GA; Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 103–4; Annette Jones White, “Freedom Movement Narrative of Annette Jones White,” 2013, <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/whiteaj.htm>; Interview with Annette Jones White, n.d., The Freedom Mosaic - National Center for Civil and Human Rights, <https://vimeo.com/51223410>.

On February 1, 1960, another intrepid group of students from another historically black college in another provincial southern town ignited the modern civil rights movement by refusing to leave their seats at a Woolworth's drug store in Greensboro, North Carolina. Waves of sit-ins followed all over the South. Even in places where concerted sit-in campaigns didn't immediately follow, students began to see themselves as potentially powerful historical actors. On the campus of Albany State, a new crop of student leaders emerged, and they were unwilling to wait patiently for reform. While the NAACP Youth Council continued to raise money and forge communal ties, Albany State students turned their focus back to campus, where they encountered sporadic harassment from white invaders and a conservative administration unwilling to support even modest protest efforts. The college had always been something of a target for rambunctious white men, who made a habit out of speeding around on campus yelling racial epithets, side-swiping students while shooting guns in the air, and throwing ice, rotten eggs, and urine-filled balloons at students. The most terrifying moment came when whites burned a cross in front of the freshmen men's dorm. Young black women began to feel increasingly unsafe. Repeatedly, late at night, white men would enter the women's dormitory and harass its residents in full view of security guards who did nothing. Female students requested, over and over again, that the doors to McIntosh Hall be fitted with a lock. Like-minded students across campus began to feel unheard and became more frustrated with each passing day.<sup>13</sup>

One person who did hear their complaints was Irene Asbury, recently hired as the new Dean of Students. She wasn't like the rest of the administrators. She was a tough-

---

<sup>13</sup> *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 104; Annette Jones White, "Freedom Movement Narrative of Annette Jones White."

minded and militant advocate for change, and unlike many of her colleagues, she took student complaints seriously. She won the kids over with small gestures. In the summer of 1960, she orchestrated a week-long seminar for the recently elected slate of Student Government Association (SGA) leaders. Afterward, Asbury lobbied to expand the powers of the SGA. For the first time, the organization received a modicum of funding. For the first time, its members were allowed to sit in on hearings of the College Disciplinary Board. Students felt empowered in a way they never had before, and they translated that feeling into more petitions, more causes, and more engagement with the administration. Modest accomplishments followed: McIntosh Hall finally got a lock, and the SGA developed new subsidiaries like the Day Student Council, which worked to foster more fellowship and cooperation between commuter and resident students. By the fall of 1960, the SGA had come into its own, conducting a full press on the administration to answer their most salient complaints. They wanted to put a stop to the white campus riders, they wanted less disgusting cafeteria food, but most of all they wanted to be taken seriously by the college president.

William H. Dennis, Jr. had grown up in the coastal town of Brunswick, Georgia before making his way to Morehouse College, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in 1931. His graduate work took him to Atlanta University, where he received his MA, and then Columbia for his Ph.D. He made his way down to southwest Georgia in 1946 to accept a position as an Associate Professor of Education at Albany State. His ascent to the top of the college, however, came as somewhat of a surprise in the summer of 1953, when he assumed the role of Acting President. He was asked to step in for Aaron Brown, who'd been recently forced out by the Board of Regents for encouraging

students and faculty to register to vote and join the NAACP. But his unforgivable crime came at a July 26, 1953 rally organized by C.W. King to galvanize more civic participation among the city's residents. Black and white leaders addressed the 1500-person crowd. Dr. T.W. Brewer encouraged black folks to form a powerful voting bloc "to get things done." Other black leaders echoed the sentiment. Aaron Brown was in the audience that day, and though he didn't make a speech, he did introduce a friend, A.T. Walden, a prominent black attorney from Atlanta. That was enough to infuriate James Gray, who howled in the pages of the *Albany Herald*, denouncing "power-seeking Negro leaders" who "abuse the confidence and good faith of white leaders." The white backlash to the meeting centered on Brown, who was hustled out of his job in short order. Although he didn't comment publicly on the firing, William Dennis, throughout his tenure as president, would apply the lesson of Aaron Brown's downfall to his career. Eager to hang on to his power, he would avoid controversy at all costs, even if it meant selling out his own students.<sup>14</sup>

Tensions between the students and President Dennis had been building throughout the fall semester of 1960, but they would reach a boiling point in 1961. The first real crisis between the two came on the heels of the desegregation of the University of Georgia (UGA). On January 9, 1961, after years of legal wrangling, Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes attended their first classes at the state's flagship institution of higher education. Students at Albany State received the news with glee, but the city's

---

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin Elijah Mays, *Dr. Benjamin E. Mays Speaks: Representative Speeches of a Great American Orator* (University Press of America, 2002), 50; Titus Brown, *Albany State University: A Centennial History: 1903-2003* (Arcadia Publishing, 2003), 45; James H. Gray, Sr., "Bloc Voting," *Albany Herald*, July 26, 1953; Richard E. Moberly, "Testing the Bonds of Segregation" (Emory University, 1991), 11–12.

white media recoiled in anguish. “We gag in protest,” James Gray editorialized, “Because our eyes are open, and we can see the blackjack and the whip all the way from here.”

Although Gray struck his usual notes of protest—the tyranny of federally enforced race-mixing, decried in the most purple of prose—his radio station, WALB, opposed the recent integration in Athens in more racially-charged tones. Shortly after Hunter and Holmes began their classes, one of WALB’s hosts declared that the two had transformed UGA’s student population from “Who’s Who to Who Dat.” The students of Albany State, who had tuned in every day to hear the venomous racial tirades beaming from WALB, were fed up. They decided to respond.<sup>15</sup>

A group of SGA leaders huddled together and typed a letter to WALB. Sensing the immense danger that could follow, Lewis Carter, Chief Justice of SGA’s Supreme Court, signed it with a fake name: Leonard Carson. After sending the first letter to the station, the students made another copy and dispatched Junior Class President Melvin Webb, who hand-delivered it to the Albany *Herald*. On January 24, 1961, the letter was published in the “People’s Forum,” a typical letters-to-the-editor section normally reserved for the random musings of local white residents with too much time on their hands. On this particular Tuesday, however, white subscribers opened their papers to read a spirited assertion unlike any they’d seen before.

“Negroes Tired Of Segregation,” the headline read, and the letter beneath was an articulate and forceful denunciation of Jim Crow. The authors identified themselves as a “representative group from the Albany State College campus,” before running through a

---

<sup>15</sup> Annette Jones White, “Freedom Movement Narrative of Annette Jones White”; Annette Jones-White, interview by Dorrie Brooks in Albany, Georgia, January 14, 2007; James H. Gray, Sr., “The Whip-Not Education,” *Albany Herald*, January 12, 1961.

long catalog of grievances. The first was an echo of what their parents had been complaining about for years—negative press coverage of blacks. They found it “very depressing” to always read reports “of racial superiority on the part of the majority race” based on the faulty dogma of white supremacy. “It is our contention,” they maintained, “that the racial barriers confronting our group are unethical, unsound, and certainly not contained within the framework of our American Constitution.” The gains of the civil rights movement, they argued, had put a dent in “the protective coating of some of your sacred social values.” They took aim at Albany’s self-proclaimed harmony between the races, arguing that the only reason the myth had taken hold was “because the Albany Negro has allowed himself to be content with mediocre relationships.” The opening salvos of the piece had been civil assertions of discontent. What followed, however, was nothing short of a declaration of war:

We, as a group, do not buy this; we are restless; we want our due, and nothing more. We are tired of your group riding through our campus grounds, inflicting mental and physical hardships on our students with nothing being done. We do not accept your air waves blasting out racial biases...We are just tired of being penned down to the various segregated barriers that exist in this town, and we intend to be heard from, in some form or fashion...We are different from the old stereotyped Negro that your parents taught you about, the difference being that we are not content with inferior conditions...we want equality. We will have it.<sup>16</sup>

The response from the white community came as expected. Angry callers flooded the switchboards at the *Herald*. White city fathers ratcheted up the pressure on William

---

<sup>16</sup> Leonard Carson, “Negroes Tired Of Segregation,” *Albany Herald*, January 24, 1961.

Dennis, demanding answers. The next day, the exasperated college president called an emergency assembly of the student body in Caroline Hall, the same auditorium that'd been torched by white arsonists only a few years earlier. He denounced the letter in no uncertain terms, and previewed his defense by stating declaratively that the letter was a fake. There were no Leonard Carsons enrolled at Albany State. At that point, Bernice Johnson, a student leader active in the NAACP Youth Council, stood up, gestured around the room at her fellow students, then looked at Dr. Dennis. "There are five hundred Leonard Carsons here," she proclaimed. The students roared with applause.<sup>17</sup>

Dennis responded harshly, demanding that the students "discontinue such actions." The next day he went on the record to soothe the white community, repeating his assurances that the letter—and its threats—were forged. The students didn't back down. Soon after the emergency assembly, a group of student leaders hand-delivered a new list of grievances to Dennis at his home. He accepted the letter and promised an answer sometime in the nebulous future. In the meantime, he began taking action against the student leadership, trying desperately to thwart the growing insurrection on campus. First he targeted SGA President Leviticus Roberts. The popular upper-classman, in training to become a teacher, had already been assigned a student-teaching post at Albany's all-black Monroe High. In the wake of the Carson letter, Roberts was called in by the Dean of Instruction, Robert Simmons, who informed him that he'd been reassigned to Spencer High School in Columbus, Georgia, over an hour's drive away. He was to report there the

---

<sup>17</sup> Holsaert, *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 105; Michael Chalfen, "Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 43-44.



next day. In quick succession, other education majors who'd been active in campus protests received similar news. After exiling SGA's head, Dennis moved to squash the entire organization, ordering that its offices be padlocked and activities suspended for the rest of the year. Dennis' heavy-handed tactics only emboldened the student body, who elected a new slate of leaders anyway. Frank Shaw and Margaret Worthy, both outspoken critics of the administration, took the reins as President and Vice President of SGA in May.<sup>18</sup>

In the summer of 1961, the students lost their one ally in the administration. Throughout the spring quarter, Dean of Students Irene Asbury had stuck up for the young activists, diligently bringing their complaints before her superiors and trying to play the role of mediator. President Dennis didn't want to hear any of it. He effectively shut Asbury out and refused to meet with her. Fed up with the intransigence of Dennis and his lieutenants, she resigned in protest. She was swiftly replaced by Charles Minor, who would prove to be a much more loyal subordinate. Asbury's unexpected departure left the student leaders of Albany State without a mentor at a crucial nexus. Young, idealistic, and itching for a fight, the young men and women of Albany State eyed the beginning of the fall quarter of 1961 anxiously. President Dennis, who'd seemingly avoided disaster through his unflinching application of selective discipline, enjoyed a brief respite from the drama that'd pervaded his hilltop campus over the past year. By October 1961, Dennis would encounter a new set of adversaries that would bring his students into a state of full rebellion and push his beloved institution toward an existential moment of reckoning.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Holsaert, 105; Annette Jones White, "Freedom Movement Narrative of Annette Jones White."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

"Do you want to be free?" Rutha Mae Harris would always remember the first time she heard that question. She was walking through downtown Albany in October of 1961 when a bespectacled young black man approached her with the challenge that would turn her into a lifelong activist. The question came from Charles Sherrod, a 24-year-old Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) veteran who, in the course of the previous year, had already become one of the organization's most seasoned leaders. Born in 1937 to an unwed teenage mother, Sherrod worked constantly to support his six brothers and sisters. He was a born minister. He began preaching at seven years old. At age twelve he built a 10x5 "church" where he delivered sermons to his playmates. "Sherrod," as he was known to his friends, was different, even a bit odd at times. He often surprised those around him with his willingness to ignore and even jump over racial boundaries. As a teenager, he shocked his family by announcing that he intended to contact his distant white relatives. To those who knew him, he seemed a man of contradictions. As one observer noted, "he seemed both shy and touchy, lazy and driven, a man of the cloth and of the street." While attending Virginia Union Theological Seminary, Sherrod answered Ella Baker's call for volunteers and became one of the founding members of SNCC in April 1960. He got his first taste of direct-action protest in 1961 when he joined a series of sit-ins at department stores in Richmond. Moving on to Rock Hill, South Carolina, Sherrod, along with fellow activists Diane Nash, Charlie Jones, and Ruby Doris Smith, inaugurated the "Jail-No-Bail" strategy, spending thirty days working on a chain gang. Sherrod became hooked, turning down a college teaching

position to pursue a lifetime of political action. He rose quickly within the organization, becoming SNCC's first field secretary in October 1961.<sup>20</sup>

Sherrod's first posting had been in McComb, Mississippi, where he got a crash course in the art of southern retail politics. He soon found out just how hard it would be to crack the rural South, where poor black farm workers held immense reservations about even attempting to register. A visit to the registrar's office would be quickly followed by an eviction notice from the landlord, or worse, a visit from gun-toting white neighbors. "It took me time to understand how to get an old fellow who says 'Yassuh,' and 'Nawsuh,' while looking down straight at the ground," he remembered. "It took me a long time to understand how to touch a man like that." That learning process took Sherrod to the sprawling fields of Terrell County, Georgia, where he teamed up with Cordell Reagon—an energetic eighteen-year-old who'd forced his way into the Nashville sit-in movements in 1960 because he thought they "looked exciting." It seemed less exciting once he arrived at the Mississippi Delta's Parchman Penitentiary as a Freedom Rider in 1961. Sherrod and Reagon both shared a fearless commitment to the movement, one they would need for their upcoming mission. When the two men hopped off the bus in Dawson, Georgia in August 1961, they stepped foot into one of the most racist and violent counties in America.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, (quotation on 525); Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 161; Robert E. Luckett, "Charles Sherrod and Martin Luther King, Jr.: Mass Action and Nonviolence in Albany," in Susan M. Glisson, ed., *The Human Tradition in the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, Md., 2006), 182; Shirley Sherrod, *The Courage to Hope: How I Stood Up to the Politics of Fear* (New York, 2012), 25-75.

<sup>21</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 524–25; Charles Melvin Sherrod, interview by Joseph Mosnier in Albany, Georgia, June 4, 2011, Civil Rights History Project, Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C., Alan Schrade, "'Bad' Baker, 'Terrible' Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany: SNCC and the Interplay

SNCC, with Sherrod's input, had targeted Terrell County as a potential setting for a concerted voter registration campaign. What they saw was untapped potential: the county had a majority-black population and had been the site of the Justice Department's first lawsuit filed under the 1957 Civil Rights Act. But in "Terrible Terrell" (or "Tombstone Territory," as it was alternately known), even the concentrated weight of the federal government couldn't produce results. After the initial suit in 1957, a three-year campaign of violence and intimidation followed. The county's sheriff, Zachary Taylor "Zeke" Matthews, ruled his constituents with an iron fist. It was not uncommon for black men who'd been arrested to wind up dead. Within the span of one week in June 1958, Matthews' deputies shot and killed three black men. Over the next two years, three more black men were killed by police under suspicious circumstances. In December 1959, D.U. Pullum, the 60-year-old head of the local NAACP, was robbed, pistol-whipped by two white men, and had his barn burned down. Davey Gibson, who'd signed on to the '57

---

between Rural and Urban Civil Rights Movements in Southwest Georgia" (University of Georgia, 1995), 15. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 524–25; Charles Melvin Sherrod, interview by Joseph Mosnier in Albany, Georgia, June 4, 2011, Civil Rights History Project, Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C., accessed March 26, 2015, [http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039\\_crh0022/](http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039_crh0022/); Alan Schrade, "'Bad' Baker, 'Terrible' Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany : SNCC and the Interplay between Rural and Urban Civil Rights Movements in Southwest Georgia" (University of Georgia, 1995), 15. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 524–25; Charles Melvin Sherrod, interview by Joseph Mosnier in Albany, Georgia, June 4, 2011, Civil Rights History Project, Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C., accessed March 26, 2015, [http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039\\_crh0022/](http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039_crh0022/); Alan Schrade, "'Bad' Baker, 'Terrible' Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany : SNCC and the Interplay between Rural and Urban Civil Rights Movements in Southwest Georgia" (University of Georgia, 1995), 15. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 524–25; Charles Melvin Sherrod, interview by Joseph Mosnier in Albany, Georgia, June 4, 2011, Civil Rights History Project, Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture, Washington D.C., accessed March 26, 2015, [http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039\\_crh0022/](http://www.loc.gov/item/afc2010039_crh0022/); Alan Schrade, "'Bad' Baker, 'Terrible' Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany : SNCC and the Interplay between Rural and Urban Civil Rights Movements in Southwest Georgia" (University of Georgia, 1995), 15.

lawsuit, lost his job as a teacher and saw his father arrested on trumped-up charges. Zeke Matthews approved of it all, boasting to a reporter that "there's nothing like fear to keep niggers in line." The terrorism worked: in 1960, while county registrars were under a permanent injunction barring them from denying the franchise on racial grounds, and while blacks made up two-thirds of the population, only 51 were registered to vote.<sup>22</sup>

Matthews' brutality reinforced an economic system that kept blacks in extreme poverty. Sherrod, no stranger to hardship, was still shocked at the destitution he found in rural southwest Georgia. He saw dilapidated wooden frame houses with earthen floors where children played with dirt. "It was the first county," he remembered, "where a bullet came so close to me that I could feel the air by my ear." The daily doses of repression were simply too much to overcome for many blacks. "Most of the Negroes are afraid," reported Lucious Holloway, a Terrell County NAACP leader. "They say that they aren't going up there to register and fool around because they will be fired or get in trouble." Squaring himself with the reality that a registration drive in the rural hinterlands would progress slowly, if at all, Sherrod went to Albany.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> "U.S. Suing Georgia County for Removal of Vote Ban on Negroes," *Sarasota Herald-Tribune*, September 5, 1958; "U.S. Sues Terrell, Charging Bias in Negro Vote Tests," *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 5, 1958; Trezzvant W. Anderson, "From a Reporter's Notebook: Dateline: Georgia," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, January 9, 1960; "'Terrible Terrell' County: Georgia's No. 1 'Hate Spot' Challenges Negroes to Register, Vote.," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, March 12, 1960; "Dawson Chalks Up New Victim: Another Negro Slain by Cops," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, March 5, 1960; "In Pullum Beating, Robbing: NAACP Has Little Hope Of State Probe Results," *New Pittsburgh Courier*, January 16, 1960; "The Georgia Civil Rights Cold Cases Project | James Brazier," <https://scholarblogs.emory.edu/emorycoldcases/category/all-cases/braziercase/>; Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, (Haymarket Books, 2013), 138; Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta*, 159–60.

<sup>23</sup> Charles Sherrod, interview by Dorrie Brooks in Albany, Georgia, January 17, 2007, Albany Civil Rights Institute; Laughlin McDonald, *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 106.

When they hadn't been walking the dusty backroads of Terrell County trying to convince scared black farmers to register, Sherrod and Reagon had been wandering around Albany. They were soon joined by Charlie Jones, another SNCC co-founder who, along with Sherrod, had taken part in the Rock Hill, South Carolina sit-ins. Before they'd left for southwest Georgia, Sherrod had reached out to the Southern Regional Council and gotten the name of C.W. King, who allowed the two young activists to set up shop in an empty room in one of his buildings. Rumors began to circulate that a group of Freedom Riders were in town, and some blacks balked at the news. "Within a week's time, everybody in the community knew who we were," Reagon remembered, "from the police on down." "People would see us walking down the street. They'd cross over to the other side." They began modestly, simply trying to be around. They spent their first few days on the basketball courts outside Monroe High, where Reagon became somewhat of a celebrity to his impressionable teenage audiences, wowing them with tales of danger and intrigue on the Freedom Rides. At the same time, Sherrod had been working on the local ministers, particularly Reverend H.C. Boyd, who allowed him to use a room at Shiloh Baptist Church. Sherrod played it safe at first, focusing his speeches on largely benign planks, like living a good Christian life and building a better Albany. Looking back on those early days, H.C. Boyd felt like he'd been conned. At the time he was overjoyed to see more than a handful of teenagers taking an active role in the church—something he'd struggled to accomplish—but had he known the true extent of Sherrod's designs, he would've thought twice before letting him use that room.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> "Charles Jones," *SNCC Digital Gateway* (blog), accessed May 9, 2018, <https://snccdigital.org/people/charles-jones/>; Pat Watters, *Down to Now: Reflections on the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 153; Branch,

But while the teenagers at Monroe High took a shine to the smooth-talking activists, some of the older black leaders were less enchanted. Chief among their critics was E.D. Hamilton, a dentist and head of the local NAACP. As the young outsiders began to accrue a devoted following with their more pointed and aggressive style, Hamilton and his chapter began to look stale in comparison. Hamilton tried to steer Sherrod's activities through the established channels of the NAACP and the Negro Voters League, but the young leader didn't show much interest. He decided instead to build a youth coalition. To do so he would need a cadre of students with established leadership qualities, a fervent desire to protest against racial injustice, and an almost foolish level of courage. So he went to Albany State.

Irene Asbury had resigned as Dean of Students at Albany State to protest against William Dennis' refusal to address student complaints. She remained an active leader within the black community, however, and when Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon approached the Lincoln Heights Improvement Association in October 1961 asking about Albany State, she furnished him with a list of particularly active students to contact. Sherrod and Reagon made quick work of the campus, making distinct and memorable impressions. The teenage Reagon was a bundle of nerves, and the students picked up on it. "Cordell was different," Annette Jones remembered, "he was tense and wound up very tight." Sherrod, on the other hand, had a gentle demeanor that students cottoned to. Sherrod "had a way of making you trust him," according to Jones. "Charles was more

---

*Parting the Waters*, 525–26. "Charles Jones," *SNCC Digital Gateway* (blog), accessed May 9, 2018, <https://snccdigital.org/people/charles-jones/>; Pat Watters, *Down to Now: Reflections on the Southern Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971), 153; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 525–26.

soothing and calm, and he was a minister, so all of those things made him very easy to talk to.”<sup>25</sup>

And so they talked. Sherrod and Reagon asked questions and listened to students, slowly accumulating intel about the state of affairs in segregated Albany. When he wasn’t listening, he was telling romanticized stories about SNCC’s crusades across the South, and the students were enraptured. They spent less time at their old haunt—the NAACP Youth Council—and more time with “the Snicks.” This did not sit well with their old mentor Tom Chatmon, who watched his chapter gradually fade into obscurity. Privately, he mused that Sherrod and Reagon were, perhaps, Communists. His concerns reverberated throughout Albany’s black leadership. Members of the Criterion Club—the top civic organization for well-to-do black men—wanted them exiled from Albany. In a message relayed through Attorney C.B. King, the club instructed Sherrod that “the community might well be advised to divest itself of your presence.” News of the outsiders’ progress traveled north to Atlanta, where NAACP leaders anxiously dispatched three officials down to Albany to prevent what they saw as an impending *coup d’état*.<sup>26</sup>

Time was already running out. While Sherrod and Reagon seduced the city’s black youths, a deadline loomed, one anxiously feared by the NAACP and eagerly awaited by SNCC. On September 22, 1961, in response to the cataclysmic Freedom Rides of the previous spring, the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) had issued a ruling outlawing segregation in interstate bus travel. That directive was to go into effect five weeks later, on November 1, 1961, at which point all bus stations and restaurants

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Annette Jones White, Part II, ASU Civil Rights Celebration, Albany, Georgia, August 22, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GZ-SOPOrGzQ&t=1s>.

<sup>26</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 526. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 526. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 526.



across the South would, technically, be opened to both races. Charles Sherrod salivated over the possibility of orchestrating a “test” of the white waiting room at Albany’s Trailways bus station. In the weeks leading up to the November 1 deadline, he watched as black students embraced the idea with a single-minded determination. Tom Chatmon was less enthused, and tried desperately to dissuade his Youth Council members from taking part in what he viewed as a potentially suicidal demonstration. But he was stuck in an impossible position. He couldn’t oppose the students on principle—of course he agreed that they should be able to exercise their new rights. But he also knew he would never receive the blessing from NAACP headquarters for such a risky assault on Jim Crow. That left him with the unsavory option of going ahead with it and angering his superiors. He decided to take his chances. After all, if he stayed on the sidelines, his Youth Council members might disown him as a mentor and follow Sherrod to the station anyway. Sensing he had no other choice, Chatmon negotiated terms with Sherrod: he agreed to sign off on the test, provided that the Youth Council members not identify themselves with the organization and stay out of jail.<sup>27</sup>

While Sherrod and Reagon plotted, news of their plans traveled across town to the halls of city government. Hoping to get ahead of the activists, Mayor Asa Kelley called a private meeting of the Albany City Commission on October 30. Behind closed doors, the white city fathers listened intently to Police Chief Laurie Pritchett’s warnings that “certain demonstrations” would soon take place. Pritchett had taken the reins of the 56-man Albany Police Department only two years earlier at the budding age of thirty-three. He’d been lured away from his post as Police Chief of Newnan, a west Georgia town of

---

<sup>27</sup> Branch, 526–27; Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 454.

just over 12,000 near the Alabama border. He'd been approved unanimously by Albany's City Commissioners, owing in no small part to his impressive resume. A native of Griffin, Georgia, he'd spent three years at Alabama Polytechnic Institute (later known as Auburn University) before leaving to hone his craft at the Southern Police Institute in Louisville, Kentucky, the Northwestern Traffic Institute in Evanston, Illinois, and the FBI National Academy in Washington, D.C. After completing his education he returned to his hometown to work his way up the ranks: three years as a foot patrolman, two years as a traffic cop, and four years as head detective. Even outside of the job, Laurie Pritchett was the type of man that small-town Rotary Clubs fawned over. He was respected among his peers (President of the FBI National Associates of Georgia), he was civically engaged (a member of the Elks and the Optimist Club), he was a churchgoer (a loyal Baptist), and he was a family man (a schoolteacher wife and two boys, ages six and four).<sup>28</sup>

Chief Pritchett was different. He was not like the archetypal blackjack-wielding despots who reinforced southern folkways with brute force. Although he may have looked the part with his bulky six-foot-one, 212-pound frame and his fondness for cigars, he was a shrewd and intelligent officer determined to preserve the status quo. He'd spent time dissecting the civil rights campaigns that'd taken place across the South and realized that the violent repression doled out by Dixie policemen played right into the hands of the outside agitators. Public beatings looked bad, they drew negative press attention and only attracted new supporters. Pritchett knew—more than perhaps any other southern police

---

<sup>28</sup> Branch, 527; "Newnan's Pritchett Selected As New Albany Police Chief," *Albany Herald*, May 20, 1959. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 527; "Newnan's Pritchett Selected As New Albany Police Chief," *Albany Herald*, May 20, 1959. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 527; "Newnan's Pritchett Selected As New Albany Police Chief," *Albany Herald*, May 20, 1959.

chief—the importance of optics. Therefore, he kept a tight leash on his deputies, sternly instructing them to keep their billy clubs holstered and avoid brutality at all costs. He was also a diligent student of the law. He’d seen how activists in Montgomery, by provoking arrests under the city’s segregation ordinances, were able to successfully challenge those laws in court. To sidestep that possibility, he would only jail activists under statutes meant to preserve the public order. The whole police force had been put on alert, Pritchett told the commissioners. No vacation time would be allowed for the foreseeable future. They heartily approved and braced themselves for the coming onslaught.<sup>29</sup>

In the early morning hours of November 1, 1961, Charles Sherrod and Cordell Reagon sat next to each other on a Trailways bus in Atlanta. They’d met the night before with SNCC officers James Forman and Charles Jones to run through the last of their preparations for the next day’s test. At the meeting they agreed to have Salynn McCollum—a veteran Freedom Rider and one of SNCC’s first white staffers—join them as an observer. Halfway through their trip, Georgia state troopers pulled the bus over. They climbed on board and strolled up and down the aisle, eyeballing each passenger. The three Freedom Riders breathed a sigh of relief when the officers waved the bus on, but the visit made it clear that their mission was not a secret. As they rolled on toward Albany, NAACP Youth Council members should have been gearing themselves up for their role. The plan had called for Sherrod and Reagon to approach from Atlanta on bus and join the students at the Albany station. The bus arrived at 6:30 am. Sherrod and Reagon, trailed by McCollum, opened the doors to the white waiting room and saw no

---

<sup>29</sup> *Parting the Waters*, 527; “Newnan’s Pritchett Selected As New Albany Police Chief.” Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 527; “Newnan’s Pritchett Selected As New Albany Police Chief.” Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 527; “Newnan’s Pritchett Selected As New Albany Police Chief.”

black faces. Spooked by rumors floating around town that local whites planned to beat or even murder them, the young activists had stayed home. Sherrod and Reagon were disheartened, but they left in search of the youths. They worked the entire rest of the day to steel the nerves of their teenage foot soldiers and by midafternoon they'd convinced nine of them to carry out the original test.<sup>30</sup>

As the nine youths approached the terminal, the three "Snicks" looked on—Sherrod and Reagon peered from an adjacent street corner while McCollum staked out a closer spot near the building. The students were able to buy their tickets to Florida, but as they strolled into the white waiting room, they were greeted by a phalanx of a half-dozen blue-uniformed Albany policemen led by Laurie Pritchett, who ordered the students to leave. Satisfied with how far they'd come, the students turned around and left. Although Pritchett successfully avoided the spectacle that the city commission had been fearing, the test—tame though it was—had an outsized effect on the black community. "From that moment on," according to Charles Sherrod, "segregation was dead." The news spread through the black community that "the children" had faced down Laurie Pritchett at the bus station. That message had a power that reworked the hearts and minds of black Albanians. Never before had there been such a public and daring challenge to Jim Crow. The modest actions of nine children demonstrated to their friends and families across town that it was possible to take dead aim at the entrenched system of inequality that'd previously seemed impenetrable. The test also short-circuited the black power structure. By taking the reins away from the local NAACP and the old guard civic clubs, Sherrod, Reagon, and the students shifted the terms of engagement. In short order, NAACP leaders

---

<sup>30</sup> Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 454–56; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 527–28. Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 454–56; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 527–28.

begrudgingly accepted the new trajectory and agreed that another test should be carried out, and this time, someone would have to get arrested.<sup>31</sup>

By spearheading the aborted Trailways test, SNCC had wrested control of Albany's youths from Tom Chatmon and the rest of the black establishment. Everything had been going well, Chatmon remembered, until Sherrod and Reagon came in "and tore the Youth Council asunder." A rift began to open between the older Jim Crow generation and the young upstarts that threatened to derail the movement in its infancy. Scrambling to impose some order on the chaos following the November 1 test, representatives from six black organizations agreed to meet with the "Snicks" to hash out their differences. On November 17, 1961, over twenty delegates from the NAACP and its Youth Council, the Federated Women's Clubs, the Ministerial Alliance, the Criterion Club, the Negro Voters League, and SNCC showed up at the house of Slater King—a local real estate man on good terms with most everyone there. A fog of mutual distrust filled the room as the various leaders tried to stress their points of agreement. They all wanted to destroy Jim Crow in Albany, but outside of SNCC, most thought it best to negotiate rather than demonstrate. Everyone knew Sherrod's army of youths were aching to take the fight into the streets, but no one wanted to take responsibility for planning those "positive actions," as they called them. So they decided to join forces. Out of that meeting, a new umbrella organization was formed. Like the Montgomery Improvement Association founded six years before, it would serve as a coordinating unit that would bring the disparate elements of the black community together in order to speak with a united voice. Over the next few years it would become evident just how difficult that task would be, but for the moment

---

<sup>31</sup> *Parting the Waters*, 527–28; *Freedom Riders*, 454–56 Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 527–28; Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 454–56..

the black leaders of Albany agreed with Aristotle that the whole was greater than the sum of its parts. They chose a name that was simple, direct, and didn't offend any particular faction. No one really remembers how the name came about. There were several suggestions thrown around when someone finally said, "Let's call it the Movement." Someone else proposed tacking "Albany" on to the front. The name stuck. Henceforth, the organization that would turn Southwest Georgia upside down and bring its story to the nation would be known as "The Albany Movement."<sup>32</sup>

To head the Movement, leaders selected Dr. William G. Anderson, a local osteopath who hadn't been in town long enough to make enemies. Only thirty-three, he stood comfortably between the old conservatives and the young firebrands. He was intelligent—he'd graduated high school at fifteen and went straight into the pre-med program at Fort Valley State until he heard FDR's call to arms and enlisted in the Navy in 1941. After the war, he married his college sweetheart Norma Lee Dixon, moved to Atlanta where he attended mortuary school, then moved to Montgomery, Alabama where he worked at a funeral home. While he was there Anderson befriended Ralph Abernathy. Soon he and Norma moved back to Atlanta where William taught mortuary science during the day, English classes at Booker T. Washington High School at night, and somehow found the time to DJ at a local radio station in between. In his rare moments of leisure time, Anderson struck up a friendship with an old family acquaintance of Norma's named Martin Luther King, Jr. Together the two worked to establish an NAACP Youth Council chapter at Morehouse College, where young King was working towards his first of many

---

<sup>32</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 529; William G. Anderson, "Reflections on the Origins of the Albany Movement," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 6. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 529; William G. Anderson, "Reflections on the Origins of the Albany Movement," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 6.

degrees. All the while Anderson had fantasized about going to med school, and a chance encounter with Willie Joe Reese, an Osteopathic Physician from Albany who happened to be his father's old fraternity brother. Reese was impressed with the ambitious young man and shepherded him to Des Moines Still College of Osteopathy where Anderson spent the next four years. After completing his degree he spent one year in Michigan as an intern at the Flint Osteopathic Hospital. At the end of his stint, he was offered a permanent position there, which he was about to accept until Norma reminded him of a pledge he'd made years earlier. If he ever became a doctor, he'd promised to return to his home state where he was most needed. Luckily, his old mentor Willie Joe Reese was still working, and invited him to join his practice down in Albany in 1957. He and Norma made friends fast, and the friends they made were "agitators" who "were a constant thorn in the side of the City Council." By the time he accepted the Presidency of the Albany Movement in November 1961, William Anderson ("Andy," to his friends) had made a little money, become a popular member of the black establishment, and developed a statesmanlike comfort in the limelight of his community.<sup>33</sup>

Only five days passed from the creation of the Albany Movement when students began to press again for those "positive actions." On November 22, 1961, three high school students from the NAACP Youth Council entered the white waiting room of the Trailways bus station, where they met another crew of policemen, who ordered them to leave. Not intimidated by the officers or the presence of Laurie Pritchett, the kids refused. And so, on the day before Thanksgiving, in front of a crowd of several dozen onlookers,

---

<sup>33</sup> William G. Anderson, "The Making of a Felon," in *Autobiographies of a Black Couple of the Greatest Generation*, ed. Pat Grauer (Lansing, MI: Privately Published, 2004), 95–180.

three black youths became the first to be arrested. They would not be the last. Although Tom Chatmon quickly bailed them out, word spread of the incident, and a palpable excitement took hold among the rest of the student body. Later in the day, Albany State had released its students for Thanksgiving Break. After being dismissed, hundreds of black youths walked, rode, or drove toward the Trailways station to catch buses back home for the holiday weekend. Anxious from hearing the rumors of potential strife that'd followed the morning arrests, Albany State's Dean of Students Charles Minor (who'd replaced the troublesome Irene Asbury months earlier) rushed to the station and posted up at the door. He tried anxiously to shepherd the students toward the colored waiting room, and for the most part he was successful. But two students—Bertha Gober and Blanton Hall—were determined to “go clean-sided” (local slang for entering the white waiting room). They brushed past the dean, who looked on in horror as the two made their way in. As they approached the ticket counter, an officer came beside them in line. “You’ll never get your ticket here,” he instructed them. They asked why. A detective gave the legal rationale: they were “tending to create a disturbance.” When they stood their ground, Laurie Pritchett had them arrested. The wheels of the movement churned into motion, and would not be stopped. The news circulated through black Albany: five kids had been thrown in jail in one day.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 530–31; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 177; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Harvard University Press, 1981), 59; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (University of Georgia Press, 1987), 88. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 530–31; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*, 1st ed. (New York: W. Morrow, 1986), 177; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University



The incarcerated students—no doubt influenced by the “jail no bail” strategy of their SNCC mentors—chose not to leave. As Thanksgiving came and went, a stream of sympathetic parents and friends visited the jail, bringing plates of turkey and news from the outside. Two days later, on Saturday morning, Bertha Gober and Blanton Hall opened two pieces of paper on Albany State letterhead and read the following: “as a result of your being apprehended and arrested...you are hereby suspended indefinitely as a student.” Shock and anger spread like wildfire as black Albanians heard the news: President William Dennis had taken sides against his own students. Dennis soon became *persona non grata*. The day after the suspensions became news, A.C. Searles—a local black journalist and longtime confidante of Dennis’—went to speak with the embattled president, who doubled down on the suspensions, claiming they would last “forever.” He added that if Searles ever set foot on the campus of Albany State again, he’d have him arrested. The exchange led Searles to snipe that Dennis was “the blackest white man I ever saw.” The day after they were released, Dennis permanently expelled Gober and Hall without hearings or due process of any kind. Although he had acted under pressure from his white Board of Regents, Dennis’ heavy-handed discipline enraged not only his students—who for the most part already hated him—but angered their parents and the rest of the black community as well. And like his previous attempts to quell student protests, it backfired. Two had gone to jail for Thanksgiving, but over the next month, hundreds would join them.<sup>35</sup>

---

Press, 1981), 59; Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (University of Georgia Press, 1987), 88.

<sup>35</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 531; A.C. Searles, interview by Tom Dent, Albany, GA, August 20, 1991, Tom Dent Papers, Amistad Research Center; Interview with Arthur

As the energy within the black community rose, Albany Movement leaders decided now was the time to take a demonstrable step forward. William Anderson and Slater King persuaded E. James Grant to let them use his Mount Zion Church for a mass meeting on Saturday night. Grant's decision was a bit of a surprise—Mount Zion was the spiritual stomping ground of the city's black bourgeoisie, known around town as “the big nigger church.” Many within the black upper-crust, particularly those in the Criterion Club, did not approve of direct-action protest, and behind closed doors they even stood up for William Dennis. “The Criterion Club purely sympathized with him [Dennis],” A.C. Searles recalled, “...as a matter of fact, most of them didn't even want to have demonstrations, most of them didn't even have anything to do with the Albany Movement.” “While we had hundreds and hundreds of people participating in the movement,” Searles remembered, “we never got the ‘big shot’ black folks...they wouldn't touch it with a ten-foot pole.”<sup>36</sup>

On Saturday, November 25, 1961, The Albany Movement held the first of what would become countless mass meetings. The theatricality and drama of the moment could not be understated. Cordell Reagon, along with Albany State students Rutha Harris and Bernice Johnson, electrified the crowd with their powerful “freedom songs”—old Christian spirituals with an activist flavor. Their most popular tune was a new take on a familiar song: “Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around” was transformed into “Ain't Gonna Let Chief Pritchett Turn Me Around.” After the songs, the five arrested students

---

Searles, 1994, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University. Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 531; A.C. Searles, interview by Tom Dent, Albany, GA, August 20, 1991, n.d., Tom Dent Papers, Amistad Research Center; Arthur Searles, 1994, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

brought the crowd to tears with their defiant proclamations of human dignity and self-worth. “After spending those two nights in jail for a worthy cause,” Bertha Gober declared, “I feel that I have gained a feeling of decency and self-respect, a feeling of cleanliness that even the dirtiest walls of Albany’s jail nor the actions of my institution cannot take away from me.” The meeting continued well into the night, and as it carried on it lifted the spirits of its attendees and formed new expectations of what was to come. Going forward, movement folk from all walks of life would pile into the creaking wooden pews of Albany’s black churches to reinvigorate themselves and grip tighter onto the shared dream of a more equal life. But as their first meeting faded, Movement leaders wondered how they would perpetuate the inertia of the moment and climb above the new power struggles rising around them.<sup>37</sup>

As reports from Albany circulated to their Atlanta offices, NAACP officials—who’d previously ignored their Southwest Georgia branch—snapped into action. After hearing of the student arrests, the Atlanta office had sent Assistant Youth Secretary Julie Wright down to revive the Albany branch. It was no secret that the Albany NAACP had faded into obscurity over the last decade, creating a vacuum that Sherrod and the “Snicks” had eagerly filled. In private conversations, the higher-ups admitted as much. “The reason for forming the Albany Movement was of necessity,” one report noted, “because the adult Albany Branch, NAACP has not done anything in the last ten years.” In spite of their organizational weaknesses, however, NAACP leaders in Atlanta thought

---

<sup>37</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (Simon and Schuster, 2007), 531–32.

they had a chance to snatch control of the Albany Movement, which they now considered “the alter ego of SNCC.” So they invited “Andy” up to Atlanta for a chat.<sup>38</sup>

They saw a target in William Anderson. He was a friendly black professional with a pragmatic, middle-of-the-road approach to civil rights. He was, in other words, almost the exact prototype of an NAACP officer. Initially, it seemed Anderson was willing to play ball. On Wednesday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, Georgia State Secretary Vernon Jordan and Regional Secretary Ruby Hurley met with William Anderson at their Atlanta office. What followed was little more than a sales pitch, with Hurley and Jordan taking turns working on the young osteopath like seasoned detectives. “There was no need,” they argued, “for two separate organizations when you have an NAACP Branch in the community.” Anderson agreed. The Albany Movement, however, had swallowed up the city’s best NAACP operatives. So, according to a description of the meeting, “Anderson agreed to take these people and play down the Albany Movement and direct everything through the Branch.” To secure this agreement, Jordan and Hurley used the carrot and the stick. At the moment, the organization had been funding the legal defense of the three high school students who’d been arrested the week before. However, as for Bertha Gober and Blanton Hall, the two Albany State students who’d followed them, well, that would all depend on Anderson’s decision. If he agreed to redirect the Albany Movement under the aegis of the NAACP, then Jordan and Hurley would “assume full financial responsibility for the students,” but if he refused, then “the NAACP would only finance the original three.” Furthermore, if this mission was successful and the Albany

---

<sup>38</sup> “Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between Vernon Jordan, NAACP Georgia Field Secretary and Gloster B. Current,” December 14, 1961, Part 20, Reel 8, NAACP Papers (microfilm).

Movement faded into obscurity, Jordan and Hurley hinted that Anderson should be President of the renewed NAACP branch. Anderson agreed.<sup>39</sup>

When he left their office, Jordan and Hurley were under the impression that "Andy" was now a loyal foot soldier intent on persuading his fellow activists to defect to the NAACP, where the branch's "Community Coordination Committee" would effectively replace the Albany Movement. Although hopeful Anderson would deliver, Jordan and Hurley had their reservations about the man. "Anderson is unreliable," they felt, "and not in the fight because he wants to be." Five days after their meeting with Anderson, Vernon Jordan flew down to Albany to sell his organization. Over the next few days, he began to understand a stark truth: the time had passed for the NAACP in Albany. Things started out hopeful though. On his first day, Jordan attended a branch meeting at the C.K. Smith Presbyterian Church and was taken aback by the stream of people that arrived. He'd never seen such an enthusiastic turnout in all his time as a field secretary. Jordan's excitement soon turned into confusion when he saw the Nominating Committee gather to select their preferred candidates for an impending branch election. But there was a problem: it wasn't an election year, and nothing about this had been announced ahead of time. Perplexed but unwilling to stifle the momentum of the meeting, Jordan sat back and watched as a curious assortment of new officers were nominated. Most shocking was the choice for president. Instead of selecting William Anderson, whom Jordan had assured would take the mantle, the local branch installed M.F. Adams, an older Presbyterian minister, relative moderate, and by no means a direct-action man. Right after the nominations were made, Anderson walked out of the meeting. Even the

---

<sup>39</sup> Jordan and Current Transcript, NAACP Papers.

new president was confused about the results. "Rev. Adams accepted the presidency," one account read, "but he did not understand why he was elected and neither did Jordan."<sup>40</sup>

On Tuesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>, Youth Council members were hard at work, blanketing the city with leaflets advertising an NAACP meeting scheduled for the next day. That night, Jordan attended his first Albany Movement mass meeting at the Poteat Funeral Home and came away disheartened by what he saw: the young organization was coming into its own. He was also perturbed by Anderson's increasingly unpredictable behavior. The doctor showed up late and immediately asked who had called tomorrow's NAACP meeting and why. This didn't exactly inspire confidence in Jordan that Andy was planning to honor their agreement. He wasn't acting like a man who wanted the Albany Movement to wind down. At the meeting, he approved of new membership cards for the organization and showed off a fresh set of buttons he had made. They read, "I Am a Supporter of the Albany Movement." Irene Asbury Wright proposed they make and sell Christmas cards to raise money. Charles Sherrod and the rest of the "Snicks" asked for money to keep their newsletter afloat, which was quickly approved. Finally, with all other business being exhausted, Andy pointed out Jordan in the room and asked if he had anything to say. He did not, he replied, he was just glad to be there. As the meeting closed with a singing of "We Shall Overcome," Jordan sulked away, wrestling with the dawning reality that the Albany Movement was picking up steam, and the man he'd chosen to derail it had no heart in the fight.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Jordan and Current Transcript, NAACP Papers.

<sup>41</sup> "Jordan and Current Transcript, NAACP Papers."

On Wednesday night, Jordan took the stage at Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, where 175 people showed up to hear him trumpet the NAACP's past accomplishments and future plans. Anderson was there. Sherrod and the "Snicks" were there. His speech went as well as expected, and they raised some money, but other than that the meeting was described as "cold," and "not enthusiastic at all." It didn't have the soaring melodies of the Albany Movement meetings—there was no piano and no one to lead the singing. Dejected, Jordan boarded a plane back to Atlanta the next day. He was joined by Irene Asbury Wright—former Albany State Dean of Students and a local leader with feet in both the NAACP and Albany Movement camps. During the flight she tried to soothe Jordan's nerves by assuring him on a few issues: yes, Anderson was "all for himself" and couldn't be trusted; no, SNCC was "not calling the shots for the Albany Movement; and of course, "there was no reason for two organizations because the energies can only go to one." Jordan felt comfortable enough to tell her about the secret agreement they'd made with Anderson, and she was "astounded and disgruntled" to hear that the Albany Movement President had been plotting behind closed doors. Wright promised that when she returned to Albany on Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, she would "expose Anderson to the members of the Albany Movement," which left Jordan a glimmer of hope that perhaps his mission could succeed after all. But Wright never got the chance. Four days after her return, an NAACP report explained the reason why: "Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, everything breaks loose in Albany."<sup>42</sup>

When Vernon Jordan returned on December 12, the Albany Movement had exploded after the arrest of a group of Freedom Riders two days earlier. By the end of

---

<sup>42</sup> Jordan and Current Transcript, NAACP Papers.

the day, Jordan had witnessed the arrest of 267 protestors. Within a week the number of arrests would swell to 750, leading a deflated Jordan to wash his hands of the situation, calling Albany the “hardest core in Georgia.” Resigned, Jordan concluded that his new president M.F. Adams was a do-nothing, and insinuated that Anderson had knowingly orchestrated his installment to nullify the NAACP’s role in the impending crisis. In a final moment of pessimistic self-assessment, Jordan acknowledged that the movement was now advancing too quickly for the NAACP to keep up, observing that, “what we consider militant, they consider radical.”<sup>43</sup>

As the local NAACP faded, the Albany Movement was left to deal with a rising tide of protests that stretched the organization and its president to the breaking point. With hundreds of protestors languishing in prison and no money to bail them out, Anderson continued his quest to find someone else to take control of the situation. Anderson, through his old college acquaintance Ralph Abernathy, suggested they bring in Martin Luther King Jr. News of the proposal immediately set off alarm bells among the SNCC leaders, who feared the loss of control, as well as the long shadow King would cast over them. Sensing that they had no chance of keeping him out, however, they begrudgingly agreed to invite King to Albany. On December 16, 1961, King followed through on his promise to lead a mass march and landed in jail along with Abernathy and Anderson.<sup>44</sup>

With King temporarily out of public view, SNCC leader Charles Jones reached out to Ella Baker, an advisor to SNCC and an outspoken critic of SCLC, who helped

---

<sup>43</sup> “Jordan and Current Transcript, NAACP Papers.”

<sup>44</sup> Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 88; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 540–41.



construct a plan to push King out of the movement. On December 17<sup>th</sup>, Jones orchestrated an Albany Movement press conference, at which Movement secretary Marion Page insisted that SCLC had not controlled the recent demonstrations, and claimed the organization needed no outside assistance. The following day, the Albany Movement struck a deal with the city. The agreement provided for the release of jailed demonstrators on bond, the desegregation of bus and train facilities, and the formation of a biracial negotiating committee after a thirty-day "cooling off period." Many found the truce puzzling, wondering why movement leaders would accept such a weak settlement for the vague promise of future negotiations.<sup>45</sup>

With alarming reports circulating about the horrible conditions of the crowded county jails, movement leaders felt pressured to do whatever necessary to bail out the hundreds of imprisoned demonstrators, especially Anderson, who was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. SNCC leaders, however, would later suggest that they had orchestrated the negotiations in order to force King out of town, privately endorsing the weak settlement and seeking King's release, and then criticizing him for not staying. The blame game would continue for decades afterward, with SNCC and SCLC leaders charging one another with deflating the movement.<sup>46</sup>

Convinced that city officials planned to deliver on their promises, King left Albany, only to find that the white leadership had no plans to take the agreement seriously. King returned to Albany the following summer for sentencing on his December convictions. Although Abernathy and King intended on refusing bail, an anonymous

---

<sup>45</sup> Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 89; Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 543–44, 547.

<sup>46</sup> Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 1988, 550–52; Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 89–91.

white attorney paid their fines, and they were released against their will. But King faced difficult tactical realities after his release. Having relieved the public pressure of King's imprisonment, the city commissioners dug in their heels and vowed no further compromises would be made. King could attempt a return to jail, but would likely only gain another suspended sentence. Faced with slim prospects for success, King left town in the summer of 1962.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Lee Formwalt, "New Georgia Encyclopedia: Albany Movement," The New Georgia Encyclopedia, accessed September 2, 2010, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1057>.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “STILL WATER THAT RUNS DEEP”: THE ALBANY MOVEMENT AFTER KING

After King's exodus, Albany Movement leaders understood their campaign would be more of a long distance march rather than a sprint. “Things are quiet,” William Anderson remarked, “but this is the kind of still water that runs deep.” In another interview, Anderson explained that the Movement was “settling down for the long haul.” No one denied that the movement had cooled off. One SNCC worker likened Albany to “a bag that has been slowly and laboriously blown up with air and then busted.” The crowds of hundreds that used to march on city hall no longer materialized; movement leaders considered it a success when more than a dozen people showed up for a picket. The shortage of protestors forced movement leaders to change their tactics. “We are no longer trying to fill the jails,” Charles Sherrod lamented, “because we can't.” Press coverage continued, though not to the degree it had when King was there. One reporter told a local activist “if there's a peaceful picket in this city, it isn't news, but if there were violence, call him.” Ignoring the diminished energy, black leaders rallied, though they had to accept that progress would come in a more gradual fashion, and each new campaign would be met with a renewed, more insidious form of white resistance. Certainly no one would claim the movement retained its ability to capture the national attention it attracted during King's tenure, but grassroots organizing and black protest

continued in the form of voter registration drives, black campaigns for public office, legal battles against discrimination, and economic boycotts.<sup>1</sup>

During the transition period after King's departure, Albany's black leadership honed in on voter registration, hoping to mount a successful campaign to develop a formidable black voting bloc. To build on the one-fifth of the black community that had been registered in the summer of 1961, organizers set up "citizenship schools" throughout the city modeled after Tennessee's Highlander Folk School and staffed mainly by Albany State students and SNCC workers. The schools offered small classes that successfully prepared dozens to vote. Reverend Samuel B. Wells, Aurelia Noble and Dr. W.J. Reese—old guard Albany Movement stalwarts—chaired the registration committee. They divided the city into six sections and assigned an organizer for each block. It was simple spadework. Most of their time was spent driving folks from the black neighborhoods and walking them into the registrar's office. The strategy worked: from mid-August to late-September, 649 blacks registered.<sup>2</sup>

While movement leaders added black citizens to the voting rolls, local white residents intensified their campaigns of violence and intimidation. SNCC workers had recently targeted Terrell County for a voter registration campaign and began conducting meetings in local churches. At the time, blacks made up 64.4 percent of the county's

---

<sup>1</sup> "Negroes Suspend Demonstrations On Albany Front," *The Times Daily*, October 28, 1962, 5; *New York Times*, August 18, 1962; Michael Chalfen, "Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965," *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 49; Michael Chalfen, "The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 567-568.

<sup>2</sup> Chalfen, "Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965," 50-51; Chalfen, "The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," 568-569.

population, yet only fifty-three blacks were registered to vote. At several meetings, county sheriff Z.T. Matthews, his deputies, and fellow white residents continually badgered participants. The harassment became so bad that the Department of Justice filed for a restraining order before Federal District Judge J. Robert Elliott, asking that Sheriff Matthews and his deputies be enjoined from further interference with registration meetings. Elliott denied the request, stating that there was no “clear and present threat” to civil rights workers.<sup>3</sup>

Early in the morning on September 9, 1962, two black churches, one of which had been the site of weekly voter registration rallies, went up in flames. The Mount Mary Baptist Church in Chickasawhatchee and the Mount Olive Baptist Church in Sasser, both located in nearby Terrell County, fell victim to white arsonists. Mount Mary’s pastor, Reverend William Boyd, had opened his church to voter registration workers. Tensions between white and black residents ran high, and federal agents got caught in the middle. While FBI agents investigated the fires, a 58-year old white farmer named Virgil Edmund Puckett drove up in a truck, “verbally abused the agents, threatened to whip them and four other spectators,” and struck agent Paul Mohr across the face with a glancing blow, knocking off his glasses.<sup>4</sup>

Mount Mary and Mount Olive were only the latest in a series of church burnings, though no one had pieced together the clues until then. Another mysterious fire had occurred three weeks earlier in Leesburg, twenty miles east, at another church used for voter registration rallies. Two weeks after that, nightriders had fired several shots into the

---

<sup>3</sup> Claude Sitton, “2 Negro Churches Burned in Georgia - F.B.I. Men Attacked - Robinson Visits Site,” *The New York Times*, September 10, 1962,

<sup>4</sup> “2 Negro Churches Burned In Georgia: FBI Agents Attacked, White Farmer Held,” *Toledo Blade*, September 10, 1962, 1.

Leesburg home of four black voter registration workers. On Wednesday, just four days before the church burnings, three lead blasts ripped through another home in Dawson, seven miles northwest of the two churches. Two shotgun pellets pierced the arm of SNCC worker Jack Chatfield, a twenty-year-old white college student from Vermont. One week later, on September 17, the I Hope Baptist Church in Dawson burned to the ground sometime before dawn. State officers detected a thick kerosene odor emanating from its charred ruins. Charles Sherrod told reporters the scene looked similar to the three other burned churches. “People are scared,” Sherrod said, “people are crying, some say they are going to leave Terrell.” The people had a right to be scared: by the time the fourth church had burned, five black homes had been fired on in the area with no arrests made.<sup>5</sup>

Despite fears of white violence, black organizers kept working, holding new voter registration meetings and soliciting help to rebuild the churches. SNCC would not be intimidated by white violence, Charles Sherrod declared, and the campaign would continue. Future meetings would have to be held in tents though—no area pastor wanted to be the next casualty. In the wake of the burnings, SNCC leaders sent a flurry of telegrams to Robert and John Kennedy, imploring them to help stamp out violence in the area, to “stop the Nazi-like reign of terror in southwestern Georgia,” as Chuck McDew put it.

For a brief moment, the spate of arson brought the press back into town, along with some famous black leaders. Soon movement leaders welcomed former baseball star

---

<sup>5</sup> Claude Sitton, “2 Negro Churches Burned in Georgia - F.B.I. Men Attacked - Robinson Visits Site”; “4th Negro Church Burned in Georgia,” *New York Times*, September 18, 1962.

Jackie Robinson, who pledged 100 dollars to help rebuild the churches and volunteered to serve as the honorary chairman of a pledge drive to restore the houses of worship. After arriving in town, Robinson visited the Mount Olive church ruins, accompanied by Wyatt Tee Walker, William Anderson, and the Reverend F.S. Swaggott. Later on in the day, a group of around fifty blacks and two whites met at Mount Olive for a prayer vigil. As ribbons of smoke rose from the ashes, the group joined hands, singing softly, “We Shall Overcome.”<sup>6</sup>

The voter registration efforts were used to drum up support for Tom Chatmon—the old NAACP Youth Council founder had thrown his hat in the ring for a county commission post. Chatmon and his supporters hoped that a strong black turnout in Precinct B could provide him a decent chance to win. On Wednesday, October 24, Chatmon placed second in the municipal elections, trailing the leading white candidate, Benny Gable, by just over a thousand votes. Without a majority winner, Chatmon successfully forced a runoff election with Gable, scheduled to take place on November 20. Albany’s white community, led by James Gray, lobbied hard against Chatmon during the interim period leading up to the runoff. Gray encouraged Albany’s white women to help “swing” the municipal election in Gable’s favor. The paper used every article to sway the town’s white voters, publishing headlines such as “Albanians Slated for Vote Tuesday: 10,000 vs. 4,000”—white against black voters. Gray’s attempts to galvanize the white base paid dividends. On November 20, Thomas Chatmon got walloped, losing by over 4,000 votes to Benny Gable.

---

<sup>6</sup> Claude Sitton, “2 Negro Churches Burned in Georgia - F.B.I. Men Attacked - Robinson Visits Site.”

Despite their victory, Gray, Gable, and their white constituents—once again—were nervous. The overwhelming segregationist campaign against Chatmon in the runoff election underscored the growing importance of black voters in electoral politics. Only a few years prior, a black candidate running for office would have been unthinkable. Chatmon's success proved that the unthinkable was now possible, and signaled the demise of fears that had previously prevented black Albanians from flexing their political muscles.

Pressures continued to mount against the City Commission from movement organizers who demanded all segregation ordinances be repealed immediately. On Wednesday, March 6, 1963, in a surprising move, the Albany City Commission voted 6-1 in favor of wiping all segregation ordinances off the books. The *Herald* described the confused state of the town, noting “there was some bewilderment in the community over the seven-member city commission’s unexpected repeal.” The repealed ordinances had previously been used to enforce segregation of city buses, taxicabs, restaurants, and theaters. The reasons for such a broad ruling against segregation remained obscure to most of the city’s residents. The city commission, which had previously ignored any demands for desegregation only a year earlier, had now changed its tune completely.<sup>7</sup>

The city made its decision to avoid federal intervention in local politics, intending to “bolster the city’s legal position in racial issues.”<sup>8</sup> Albany’s white power brokers were mainly concerned with the outcome of a desegregation suit filed by lawyers for the

---

<sup>7</sup> Claude Sitton, “Negro 'Victory' Fades in Georgia: Albany's Repeal of Racial Law a Mere Legal Move,” *The New York Times*, March 14, 1963. “Segregation Laws Voided In Albany, Ga.: Ruling Body Vague On Reason; City Site Of 1962 Strife,” *Toledo Blade*, March 7, 1963, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Chalfen, “The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 572.



Albany Movement and supported by the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund against the City of Albany. The lawsuit aimed to enjoin Police Chief Laurie Pritchett and Mayor Asa Kelley from cooperating to enforce segregation throughout the city.<sup>9</sup>

Judge A.N. Durden had admitted in July that the U.S. Supreme Court had “expressly overruled” most segregation laws, so movement leaders held out a shred of hope for a favorable ruling. But on Valentine’s Day, 1963, Judge J. Robert Elliott dashed hopes for a legal end to segregation in Albany by ruling in favor of the city. After three extended hearings conducted by the federal district court, Elliott held that the plaintiffs “did not represent the class on whose behalf they brought suit, because the record did not disclose that they individually had ever been denied access to the public facilities in suit or had been compelled to use them on a segregated basis.” Elliott also denied an injunction that would have prevented state police from interfering with peaceful protest. In the wake of the ruling, C.B. King promised to appeal the decision to the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. William Anderson organized a mass meeting to be held on February 18, and warned the city that they would continue their protests if public facilities remained segregated.<sup>10</sup>

Although the city had won in district court, they had no faith that Elbert Tuttle, Chief Justice of the Fifth Circuit, would uphold their verdict. Anticipating his unwelcome ruling, the City Commission decided to voluntarily desegregate. If they did so, they could avoid a harsh injunction from Tuttle and begin auctioning off their public spaces to

---

<sup>9</sup> *Anderson v. City of Albany*, 321 F. 2d 649 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1963).

<sup>10</sup> *Anderson v. City of Albany*, vol. 321; Chalfen, “Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965,” 52; Chalfen, “‘The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 571; Claude Sitton, “Negro ‘Victory’ Fades in Georgia: Albany’s Repeal of Racial Law a Mere Legal Move.”

private bidders. They claimed they were “not interested in desegregating local facilities” but simply complying with the law “as outlined in numerous Supreme Court decisions.” Their true intentions were not hidden. “In our view,” a spokesman for the city wrote, “this will strengthen rather than weaken the existing social patterns of racial segregation.” In addition to removing Chapter 22 of the City Ordinances, the commission voted by a narrow 4-3 margin to desegregate the Albany Public Library, closed since 1961 when the first integration attempts commenced. The ruling still lacked teeth though, “recommending” rather than requiring the library be reopened on an integrated basis. Full approval of the Albany Library Board would be needed before any concrete desegregation plans were implemented. Four days after the city commission’s decision, the library board voted by a six to one margin to reopen the library on a thirty-day trial basis. The terms of the agreement retained a tinge of segregation: the library would operate on a checkout-only basis, no reading or lounging would be allowed inside the building, and no new library cards were to be issued for two months. !While the board didn’t explicitly mention race as a causal factor in their decision, they explained their measures were taken “in accordance with stipulations made at Thursday’s city commission meeting.”<sup>11</sup>

Black leaders had mixed reactions. William Anderson initially regarded the move as “a great moral victory.” Marion Page remained wary of the city’s true intentions. “My

---

<sup>11</sup> Don McKee, “Albany Closes Parks, Library In New Dispute,” *The Modesto Bee*, August 12, 1962, sec. A, 3; Hedrick Smith, “Albany, Ga., Closes Parks and Libraries To Balk Integration; Free From Incident, Georgians Close Public Facilities, Dr. King Leaves City Boys Are Curious,” *The New York Times*, August 12, 1962, 1 “Segregation Laws Voided In Albany, Ga.: Ruling Body Vague On Reason; City Site Of 1962 Strife,” 5; United Press International, “Albany Wipes Segregation Statutes Off City Books,” *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (Sarasota, FL, March 8, 1963), 14.

attitude is that if what they're doing is in good faith, they certainly will have the utmost cooperation from us," he said. "If it's not in good faith, it will evidence itself."<sup>12</sup> Some movement veterans took harsher stances against the ruling. Martin Luther King, Jr., now gone from Albany, angrily branded the commission's ruling as a "subtle and conniving move to perpetuate discrimination." King bashed the commission's maneuvering, arguing that their actions could not be "interpreted as anything that resembles a good faith move."<sup>13</sup>

Blacks were suspicious, whites were unhappy, but the grudging concessions represented the first major breakthrough of the post-King era. That the City Commission feared the threat of further protests enough to strip away their legal security blanket testified to the newly acquired black bargaining power. And Albany's white citizens choosing access to the library over uncompromising segregation hinted that city politicians didn't necessarily speak for all their constituents. The move served notice that the political and legal tides were turning against segregation.

No matter the motivation behind the ruling, the movement had knocked out the legal underpinnings of Jim Crow in southwest Georgia.<sup>14</sup> More importantly, the city's attempts to stifle black protest by desegregating on paper failed. The ruling marked the beginning of a renewed period of black activism that would stretch throughout the 1960s. Albany's black leaders—for the most part—allowed themselves a degree of cautious optimism. William Anderson hoped for the best. Charles Sherrod was even more excited,

---

<sup>12</sup> "Segregation Laws Voided In Albany, Ga.: Ruling Body Vague On Reason; City Site Of 1962 Strife," 5.

<sup>13</sup> "Albany Wipes Segregation Statutes Off City Books," 14.

<sup>14</sup> Chalfen, "The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," 572.

announcing that “Albany can show the way to [Dougherty] County and to the world,” adding that Albany’s black citizens were “overjoyed at the decision.”<sup>15</sup>

Despite the gains made by black protestors in the past year, the city’s white power structure still insisted the town remained as segregated as ever. Speaking a reporter after the decision, Laurie Pritchett sat in his newly renovated office adorned with Old Glory and the Confederate battle flag, flashed a grin, and casually dismissed any notions of black progress in Albany. “I don’t know of anything for them to be overjoyed about,” he smirked. “You look around and see if anything’s integrated, and if it is, call me, will you?” Although he and his men had arrested approximately 1,500 people since November 1961, he remained adamant they had “never enforced any segregation ordinances in Albany.”<sup>16</sup>

The commission had been correct to state that their ruling would strengthen segregation, at least in the immediate aftermath of their decision. Four days later, when four black girls sat down at a white lunch counter at Lee’s Drugs, the girls were immediately asked to leave, which they did. Assistant Deputy J.J. Larsey arrived quickly and arrested the four while they were walking home, only a block away from the diner. Chief Pritchett said the girls had left only after seeing the police arrive, and were arrested just outside the door. They were charged with violating “an antitrespassing ordinance” and released in a few hours.<sup>17</sup> The arrest of the four girls spawned further tests at lunch counters, restaurants, theaters, libraries, and taxicabs. Two black youths were arrested and cited for contempt of court by Judge A.N. Durden after sitting down in the white

---

<sup>15</sup> Claude Sitton, “Negro 'Victory' Fades in Georgia: Albany's Repeal of Racial Law a Mere Legal Move.”

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

section of his courtroom. The assistant manager of a local chain of theaters turned away five black high school girls from two separate establishments. When told they were not welcome, one of the girls asked, “Is it because we’re Negroes?” “Yes,” the manager replied, “we are a segregated theater. You’re welcome.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the few immediate victories for the Movement came with the desegregation of the Carnegie Library. The main branch of the Carnegie Library, a “converted old home of buff bricks,” held nearly 50,000 volumes, only 6,000 of which were kept at the Lee Street branch for blacks. When the reopening of the library seemed in doubt, 1,600 whites signed a petition calling on the City Commission to reopen it. They begrudgingly assented. As the library reopened its doors, whites flooded in, checking out 400 books.<sup>19</sup>

Nine blacks made the trip to the library. Their visit went smoothly, without violence or protest from whites. “They’ve all been very nice and very polite and very quiet,” one library official said of the black patrons. Movement leaders who previously praised the decision to integrate the library suddenly changed their attitudes toward the ruling. Mrs. E.L. Jackson, recording secretary for the Albany Movement, said the reopening represented progress but should not be considered true desegregation. She characterized the commission’s ruling as too little too late, reminding the press that only one-year earlier, “Negroes were being dragged from the library and locked up.”<sup>20</sup>

W.G. Anderson, who only a week later had praised the city’s ruling, responded bitterly when asked about the recent integration of the library. “It’s kind of late for

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

piecemeal legislation,” he said. “It’s kind of late to scrape the crumbs off the table.”

Anderson dismissed the episode, characterizing the library as “something they weren’t using anyway.” He defended the movement’s decision to continue desegregation tests to “demonstrate to the nation that segregation is not dead in Albany.”<sup>21</sup>

The integration of the library, while a success, highlighted the collective disillusionment of the black community with white politicians. Anderson bashed the Kennedy Administration, claiming there were some in the White House sympathetic to the movement, “but who don’t understand the plight of the Negro fully.” One of the most scathing comments came from Marion Page, secretary of the Albany Movement. When questioned about his faith in Albany’s white officials, Page replied, “Oh, them...I don’t trust them as far as I can throw a bull elephant by the tail.”<sup>22</sup>

Black protest continued in Albany. As part of a multi-pronged approach aimed at breaking the back of segregation in Albany, black and white activists—most of the latter being transplanted northern undergrads—turned their attention to desegregating the public pool, which had remained lily white since its construction. The pool was located in Tift Park in the central part of town, and was supported by tax dollars from both black and white residents. Black children often swam in the Flint River, as there was no black public pool for them to use.

In an attempt to head off future protests, Albany power brokers sold the pool to *Herald* editor James Gray. Gray, acting as the head of a private corporation that had purchased the municipal pool, converted the public facility into a private club. But if Gray had hoped to avoid demonstrations and retain the pool’s quiet, segregated existence,

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

he failed miserably. According to SNCC activist Peter De Lissovoy, “the case of the Tift Park pool kind of boomeranged and just called the more attention to the issue of the pool and made the discussion about it all the hotter.” SNCC had a seemingly endless list of projects in Albany, but when the town’s white leaders sold the Tift Park pool to James Gray, organizers made it a top priority to protest against the “potent symbol” of segregation the pool had become.<sup>23</sup>

The first orchestrated protest against the pool had taken place a year before. On July 19, 1962, eighty black youths attempted to gain entrance to the Tift Park pool. Police ordered the protestors to leave the park or be arrested; they left. Laurie Pritchett insisted the youths were not there to swim, but rather to “create a disturbance.” On a muggy Wednesday in June of 1963, two white SNCC workers, Peter de Lissovoy and Phil Davis teamed up with a local gang leader and moonshine runner named James Daniel and walked throughout the town drumming up support for a march to the Tift Park pool later that night.<sup>24</sup>

When seven o’clock rolled around, only a few dozen kids had showed up. Not knowing what else to do, the SNCC workers began singing. “[T]he sound must have carried,” one worker said, “for the kids began to swirl in from all directions.” After a few songs, R.B. King, one of the leaders of the march, got up to speak. “Hey,” he shouted, “We supposed to be tough here in CME. We supposed to be bad. But I don’t know. We

---

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Peter de Lissovoy, in *The Great Pool Jump & Other Stories from the Civil Rights Movement in Southwest Georgia* (Lancaster, New Hampshire: YouArePerfectPress, 2010), 93; Associated Press, “Albany Okays Tentative Sale Of White Pool,” *Times Daily*, n.d., sec. 2; United Press International, “Sale of Pools Upheld,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 1963.

<sup>24</sup> Associated Press, “Negros [sic] Test Georgia City's Race Barriers,” *Youngstown Vindicator*, July 19, 1962, 15.

got to show it. We got to show em over to East Albany. We got to show em over at Harlem and Holly Homes and the Washington Project.” “I know CME is bad,” he continued, “and we got to show em just how bad!—How many want to march?”<sup>25</sup>

The group began marching in circles around the neighborhood, attracting more and more protestors. After circling the block, the marchers headed downtown. As they loomed closer to the pool, five police squad cars and a paddy wagon arrived to disperse the crowd. The marchers, consisting primarily of black youths, scattered immediately. “One minute there were 250,” a marcher stated, “the next there were 30.” The marchers who did not escape the dozen white police officers in time spent the next few days in the Albany city jail.<sup>26</sup> On the way to the jail, march leader James Daniel encouraged his fellow protestors to lean en masse against the side of the wagon, causing it to tip wildly a few times and annoy the police officers up front.

Not every protest in Albany made the headlines, especially after the departure of Martin Luther King, Jr. Details of the first march on the Tift Park pool of 1963 went unrecorded for decades. Those arrested at the march were hauled away in police cars “in a weird moon-drenched obscurity,” SNCC activist Pete de Lissovoy remembered. The failed march to Tift Park pool that night is emblematic of the Albany Movement in the post-King era. Although protestors didn’t get anywhere near the pool, the spontaneous and improvised march shot pure adrenaline into the small community. Not every protest

---

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Peter de Lissovoy, in *The Great Pool Jump & Other Stories from the Civil Rights Movement in Southwest Georgia*, 104-105.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 106.



in Albany followed weeks of meticulous planning. And quite a few, especially in the post-King phase, made no headlines at all.<sup>27</sup>

Another forgotten episode took place a few weeks later. The Great Pool Jump began as an idea blurted out at a planning session. At one point during the meeting, a young black activist named Randy Battle leaned over to Joni Rabinowitz, a young white northern college girl, and whispered, “Hell, why don’t they just go get a bunch of folks together to go and jump *in* the sucker?” Rabinowitz spiked into the air and put forth Battle’s suggestion. Over seventy-five volunteered. They met at a house in the C.M.E. district (the black side of downtown named for the CME Methodist Church but also affectionately known as “Crime, Murder, and the Electric Chair”) and separated the protestors into several groups. Battle instructed them to take different routes and approach the pool from separate angles. He hoped that by dividing up, police would be unable to grab everyone, giving a few a clean shot at the park. When the rag-tag interracial brigade came within eyeshot, everyone would sprint toward the fence, jump it, and dive into the pool.<sup>28</sup>

When protestors got within fifty feet of the pool, police (who’d been tipped off) ordered them to leave. Most of the seventy-five would-be-jumpers dispersed, leaving three—Randy Battle, Jake Wallace, and James Daniels—to carry out the mission. After scoping out the scene, the three found an opening. “And we turned around,” Battle remembered, “and when we started running, we hit that fence and were over that fence and in that pool in a second. And then we swam on cross that pool to where that ladder

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Randy Battle, located in *The Great Pool Jump & Other Stories from the Civil Rights Movement in Southwest Georgia*, 11.

came up and then out we went out that back gate.” When the three black youths touched the water, “goddam it them white folks and kids went straight up in the air, they didn’t climb out, they went straight up in the air and *flew* over to the sides,” while screaming, “Niggas! Niggas!”<sup>29</sup>

The three boys immediately hopped over the fence and made their escape, first hiding in a tree and then making their way to Battle’s house. Still half-wet, Battle went straight to his job at Earl Bronson’s grocery store. When his boss asked him if he knew anything about the “niggers” that jumped in the pool, Battle feigned ignorance and went back to work. A few minutes later, Battle decided he’d been called a nigger one too many times in his life. He borrowed 150 dollars from his paycheck, left the store, and never returned. When interviewed about the events of that muggy summer day, Battle boasted that jumping into the Tift Park pool and quitting his job marked the “real beginning” of his participation in the movement. Although he’d been involved in several activities before the jump, they were “just something to do.” After the “Great Pool Jump,” Battle became a true believer. Meanwhile, Albany whites were so shocked and disgusted by the fact that black skin had touched whites-only-water that they spent several days draining and cleaning the pool to ease fears of contamination.<sup>30</sup>

The “Great Pool Jump” galvanized SNCC activists, giving them a renewed confidence and swagger. One activist characterized the jump as “an electrifying and inspiring bravado act for the black kids in the community...we coasted on the joy and energy of that for some time.” The Tift Park Pool Jump became the first of many demonstrations in the summer of 1963, several of which were conceived, planned, and

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 13.

led by a dedicated local community of black youths. Not long the first jump, Battle and James Daniel snuck into the park late at night and dumped army dye into the water. By the next morning, the pool had turned bright yellow and workers were forced to drain the water yet again.<sup>31</sup>

SNCC's energized force of young activists marched, demonstrated, vandalized, and conducted sit-ins, annoying white leaders any way they could. The young workers slept in bunk beds at the "SNCC house," located on the second floor of a building owned by the Federated Women's Club. Activists Pete de Lissovoy and James Daniel carried out small yet defiant acts of protest in the summer of 1963. The two hid cans of spray paint, rags, and homemade stencils under the SNCC house. Early in the morning, Lissovoy and Daniel crisscrossed through town and spray painted the word "SEGREGATION" under the "STOP" on as many of the red octagons they could find. These protests, although somewhat juvenile, had power. In 1963, segregation remained "intact as if it had been 1923 or 1893," according to one activist, and "an atmosphere of intense and raw fear" pervaded the town. But that fear, that intimidation—which whites had always taken for granted—seemed to bounce right off the idealistic "Snicks." Something had changed.<sup>32</sup>

While the boisterous teenagers implemented their campaign of prank-tivism, older folks, also inspired by the new activism, began filing lawsuits. Attempts to desegregate Albany's public schools started on Tuesday, September 4, 1962, when fourteen black students attempted to integrate Albany High School. After walking through several police barricades, the crew snuck into the school and asked to enroll. They were told school assignments had already been made and would "not be changed—by integration attempts

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

or for any other reason.” Earlier in the morning, someone had spray painted on the school’s plate glass front door, in white letters: “No niggers please.” The September integration attempt came in the wake of one of the largest Ku Klux Klan rallies ever seen in the area. Blacks had refused to be intimidated by the Klan, the Albany police, or the city’s white power structure. Shortly thereafter, C.B. King filed a lawsuit on behalf of the Gaines family seeking to enjoin the Dougherty County Board of Education “from operating a biracial school system.” After filling the initial complaint, King made an application for a temporary injunction against the school that came to court on July 8, 1963.<sup>33</sup>

Judge J. Robert Elliott, who one movement attorney recalled as “hostile to anything that even had a hint of civil rights in it,” presided over the case. Herbert Phipps, who worked with C.B. King throughout the 1970s, remembered Elliott as a judge who would not give “any kind of relief on any claim dealing with civil rights.” One particular story stood out to Phipps: in the mid-1960s, while Phipps prepared to enter law school, he visited the Dougherty County Courthouse to watch C.B. King, Donald Hollowell, and Constance Baker Motley argue a civil rights case before Judge Elliott. King and his legal team were representing two black teachers from Terrell County, both of whom had master’s degrees. The two teachers had been denied the right to vote by the Terrell County registrar (a man with “a high school education at best”) who claimed they couldn’t pass the literacy test required of all potential registrants. Despite overwhelming

---

<sup>33</sup> United Press International, “Albany, Ga., public schools reject Negroes”; *Gaines v. Dougherty County Bd. of Education*, 222 F. Supp. 166 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1963).

evidence in the teachers' favor, Elliott ruled that the registrar had been justified in his actions.<sup>34</sup>

Considering his strident opposition to civil rights legislation, it came as a shock to many when Elliott ruled in favor of desegregating Albany's public schools. Elliott provided a cautious opinion, however, arguing that the Dougherty County Board of Education had "sought in good faith to provide educational facilities for all of the children of all races." He noted, however, that it was "obvious that their ideas of proper school administration" did not "coincide with those expressed by the Supreme Court of the United States." Elliott charged the Dougherty County Board of Education with running a segregated school system in violation of the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling. Throughout the remainder of his ruling, however, Judge Elliott employed popular white resistance rhetoric, foreshadowing the long, protracted battle over the pace of integration that would last for over a decade.<sup>35</sup>

Elliott declared it "in the best interest of all concerned" that integration of Albany's public schools "be brought about in an orderly fashion." While the Dougherty County Board of Education assured the judge they would comply with any court order, Elliott feared that "any peremptory order issued by the court would of necessity be haphazard and probably ill-conceived." Elliott ordered the Dougherty County Board of Education to submit, within thirty days, a plan to desegregate their schools. Elliott advised the Board of Education to design something "in good faith" that would eliminate school assignments based on race "with reasonable promptness."<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Herbert Phipps, January 7, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> *Gaines v. Dougherty County Bd. of Education*, vol. 222.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

When the Dougherty County Board of Education presented their desegregation plan to the county court in 1963, it focused much more on the “deliberate” rather than the “speed” called for by the Supreme Court. Over objections from C.B. King, Elliott accepted the plan, which called for a miserly grade-a-year desegregation schedule. Beginning in September 1964, the first grade of all Dougherty County public schools would be integrated. Board members would allow only students entering the first grade to choose their preferred institution. However, students would only be assigned to the school of their choice “if other basic considerations which are uniformly applied in assigning all students to all schools permit.” These considerations included: “the student’s proximity to the school, the building capacity, and any unusual transportation problems which might be involved.” One sentence in the plan revealed the school board’s true intentions: “It is anticipated that the normal net effect will be that pupils will attend the school located nearest their residence.” Considering the intense pattern of racially segregated housing in Albany at the time, the board’s fixation on geographical proximity would effectively prevent any meaningful desegregation.<sup>37</sup>

C.B. King and the Gaines family were furious over the plan. King called it an “illusion,” arguing that the freedom of choice program would allow board members to fabricate “problems” in order to deny black students the right to attend white schools. Those responsible for assigning the pupils, they argued, would “hide behind a pretense of lack of building capacity, absence of proximity and fictitious transportation problems as justification for refusing to assign Negro pupils to the school of their choice.” After

---

<sup>37</sup> *Gaines v. Dougherty County Bd. of Education*, vol. 222; Michael Chalfen, “The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 586-587.

Elliott made his intentions clear, King asked that the nominal plaintiffs in the case, the children of the Gaines family, be allowed to register for the upcoming school year. Elliott again denied King's claim, arguing that this would put an undue burden on the Dougherty County School administrators. "To grant such exceptions," he wrote, "would have the effect of inviting the destruction of the very plan which the Court has held is reasonable and adequate for the school system of Dougherty County." Elliott also claimed the nominal plaintiffs had sued as a class action, and therefore should not be entitled to any "preferential treatment."

Elliott's ruling, however cautious, made it clear the legal tide had begun to turn against segregation. But his confrontational posturing towards C.B. King and the Gaines family demonstrated that Albany Movement leaders shouldn't look to the county courts for justice. Elliott could be seen most accurately as a symbol of white resistance in Albany—while he admitted segregation could no longer exist in Dougherty County, he made no attempt to expedite the issue, allowing the process to move at a snail's pace. The Dougherty County Board of Education followed Elliott's lead, doing only what was absolutely necessary under the law, effectively delaying meaningful integration for years to come. C.B. King and black Albanians responded vigorously to white resistance tactics in the wake of the Elliott ruling. King not only began the appeal process through federal courts, but also decided to take on Georgia's lily-white political machine directly.<sup>38</sup>

C.B. King came from a large, well-respected black family with a reputation for self-reliance and hard work. The third of seven sons, King was born in Albany on October 12, 1923, to Margaret Slater and Clennon W. "Daddy" King, both of whom were

---

<sup>38</sup> *Gaines v. Dougherty County Bd. of Education*, vol. 222.

graduates of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute. C.W. and Margaret possessed a strong passion for education and an unwavering sense of racial pride, values they passed on to their seven sons. C.W., who had become synonymous with the local NAACP, transmitted his activist streak to his sons. C.B. and his brothers were educated in Albany's segregated school system at a time when the separation of the races remained an established way of life in Southwest Georgia. Following a brief stint at Tuskegee, C.B. worked at a naval war plant in the Northwest. After serving a few years in the navy, C.B. received his G.I. Bill benefits, which he used to attend Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, while also working part time to make ends meet. King graduated from Fisk in 1949, and began applying to law schools.<sup>39</sup>

Denied access to Georgia's whites-only law schools, King enrolled at Case Western University in Cleveland, Ohio. He was driven by the memories of his youth. One particular story stood out in King's mind: when he was ten years old, young C.B. was at a playground near his house when a policeman pulled up and jumped out, gun in hand. "All of us little colored boys ran like chickens," he recalled. "I hid under a building but some of the kids were arrested for 'vagrancy' or 'loitering.' Right then I felt that there was something wrong with the way the law operated in the Negro community." After

---

<sup>39</sup> John Head, "Patriarch's legacy of self-reliance and hard work leaves an indelible mark on next generations," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, March 26, 2000, sec. M, 1; Ellen Lake, "C.B. King: Silhouette," May 13, 1964; Selwyn Crawford, "Georgia family stood tall in civil rights battle: Clennon W. King's kin still forging social change," *The Dallas Morning News*, February 27, 2000; Tim Wesselman, "Day for a King," *The Albany Herald*, November 4, 2002, sec. A.



graduating and passing the Ohio bar, King decided to take the Georgia bar exam, and to his surprise, he passed.<sup>40</sup>

“I wanted very much to return to Albany,” King said, “because I felt that something could and ought to be done to improve those conditions, which were repugnant to my sense of fairness, that I had witnessed growing up.” King moved back to Albany and began his practice in 1954, opening an office on South Jackson Street in the back of a funeral home. “The funeral home,” he later wrote, “was fittingly symbolic of the putrescent state of the law hereabouts.” When he opened up shop in Albany, King became the only black lawyer in Southwest Georgia at the time and one of only a handful of black lawyers in the entire state. He took whatever work he could find, “which usually meant Black people in trouble without funds to require the skills and empathy of the white establishment.”<sup>41</sup>

King received a harsh reception in the courts. “Before I began practicing here,” he said, “the courtroom had been quite generally like a country club” where “white judges and white lawyers all pleasantly agreed with each other.” In his first criminal case, King defended a black teenager who’d been shot by the police and charged with resisting arrest. When he sat down in the lawyer’s box—previously reserved for white attorneys—the local sheriff told King to “go sit with them other niggers.” “No thank you,” King replied, and the sheriff walked away. King established himself as a dedicated civil rights defender. By 1964 he had become the official lawyer for the Albany Movement, representing more than 1,000 jailed protestors. Albany residents always turned to King

---

<sup>40</sup> John Head, “Patriarch’s legacy of self-reliance and hard work leaves an indelible mark on next generations,” 1; Tim Wesselman, “Day for a King,” 1,4; Marlise James, *The People’s Lawyers*, 1st ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 293.

<sup>41</sup> Marlise James, *The People’s Lawyers*, 294.

for help when arrested; he became known as “the legal department of the Negro movement in Southwest Georgia.” And now, in the midst of his battle for school integration, King decided to directly challenge Georgia’s white political machine.<sup>42</sup>

He wouldn’t be the first in his family to dabble in politics. In late 1963, C.B. King’s brother Slater announced his run for mayor in the upcoming October municipal elections. Because of his campaign, attendance at mass meetings increased during September and October. Reverend Samuel B. Wells spearheaded a local voter registration drive, but failed to galvanize a somewhat deflated black voter base. King lost the October election in a landslide, trailing the leading white candidate by almost 5,000 votes. Less than half of Albany’s black registered voters cast their ballots on Election Day; black voter turnout was ten percent lower than it had been the year earlier. Despite the unfortunate showing in the ’63 mayoral election, movement leaders saw the need for new and improved registration initiatives.<sup>43</sup>

On April 4, 1964, voter registration workers found a worthy cause when C.B. King qualified to enter the Democratic primary race for the Second District U.S. House of Representatives seat, becoming the first African-American to seek the office since Reconstruction. King and his supporters knew he had virtually no chance of winning the Democratic nomination, yet they campaigned heavily throughout the district. In 1964, Georgia’s Second District encompassed fourteen counties, including Baker, Dougherty,

---

<sup>42</sup> Marlise James, *The People's Lawyers*, 294; Lake, “C.B. King: Silhouette.”; “Southwest Georgia,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee papers, 1959-1972* (Sanford N.C.: Microfilming Corp. of America, 1981), 19/0828.

<sup>43</sup> Michael Chalfen, “Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965,” *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 60; Chalfen, “The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 590-591.

Randolph, Terrell, and Worth, where SNCC workers had been conducting voter registration campaigns as part of the Southwest Georgia Project. 116,892 African-Americans lived in the second congressional district, comprising nearly forty percent of the population. Median income for whites stood at \$3,114, while blacks earned \$1,771 on average. King and his supporters realized that to have any chance in the election would require a huge get-out-the-vote operation in Southwest Georgia.<sup>44</sup>

A.C. Searles, a leader in the black community and editor of the *Southwest Georgian*, volunteered to serve as King's campaign manager. SNCC worker John Perdew described Searles as "a short, balding, no-nonsense journalist" who "had to swim upstream most of the time." Despite the lack of any significant advertising revenue or salaried reporters, and amidst vociferous condemnation from the white establishment, Searles published a credible black newspaper every week.<sup>45</sup>

Since its initial publication in 1938, *The Southwest Georgian* had established itself as the voice of Albany's black community. Searles maintained close ties with Albany Movement leaders, printing accounts of demonstrations, police brutality, mass meetings, and other protest activities in Albany.<sup>46</sup> *The Southwest Georgian* remained one of the few media sources that King could expect any press attention from. "Television at

---

<sup>44</sup> "Negro Lawyer Runs for Congress Seat from Georgia," Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, 19/0557; "C.B. King: Silhouette," May 13, 1964; Randy Battle, "Driving for Attorney C.B. King With Stokeley, Bill Hansen, and Herman Kitchens in Pine Bluff, Arkansas," n.d., <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/rbcbking.htm>; Tim Wesselman, "Day for a King."

<sup>45</sup> John Perdew, *Education of a Harvard Guy: Footsoldier in the Civil Rights Movement* (GrantHouse Publishers, forthcoming, in author's possession), 144; Randy Battle, "Driving for Attorney C.B. King With Stokeley, Bill Hansen, and Herman Kitchens in Pine Bluff, Arkansas," n.d., <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/rbcbking.htm>

<sup>46</sup> Sadly, no comprehensive archive exists of these back issues, to my knowledge.

the time,” John Perdew wrote, “was an entirely white affair.” Television stations in Southwest Georgia reported only on the incidents and demonstrations that “could not be ignored.” “Meanwhile,” throughout Southwest Georgia, “there were unreported campaigns, picket lines, sit-ins, voter registration drives, arrests, court cases, [and] incidents of police brutality.”<sup>47</sup>

Despite the long odds of his candidacy, King assembled a devoted staff willing to canvass the entire Second District (which spanned 20 counties and 5,000 square miles) every single day leading up to the September 9 primary. King’s staff understood the impact his run could have on the minds of Southwest Georgia’s black residents. “King bears the hopes of thousands,” one staffer wrote, “for whom ‘the law’ has never meant more than ‘the cops.’” King’s speech at one particular campaign rally in Albany on a hot summer day in June 1964 painted a compelling portrait of his political ideology and campaign intentions.<sup>48</sup>

King had been driving around the Harlem section of Albany with a loudspeaker mounted on the back of a pickup truck, speaking to crowds outside of bars and juke joints. King stopped outside “Ware’s Place,” a local black hangout “full of country folk looking for a good time, factory workers off for the day, barbers and clerks and cab drivers in for a quick one, pool players resting, crap shooters shooting, hustlers, down-and-outs, [and] kings-for-a-day.” A group of young girls serving as King’s official “campaign singers” began performing, and “everyone not too drunk to move came out for

---

<sup>47</sup> *Education of a Harvard Guy*, 144-145.

<sup>48</sup> “Southwest Georgia,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, 19/0828. Peter de Lissovoy, “Odds on Freedom: Gambler’s Choice in Georgia,” *The Nation*, June 22, 1964, 618.

a look.” After the singers finished, King stooped slightly to the microphone and began to speak.<sup>49</sup>

King pitched the most pressing question: “Why does a Negro—a black boy—presume to run for the Congress of the United States? How does he dare?” After waiting a few beats, he answered: “Why not? I have the *right* to run.” The audience burst into applause and began whooping and yelling. “Their response,” one witness remembered, “was as strong as their claim to the right of representation has been weak, and as sincere and long as their desire now to assume it at last.” King portrayed himself as a candidate that would fight to improve the lives of all citizens, regardless of skin color. He felt he “had much to offer white and Negro residents of the district,” and thought they were “ready to vote for a qualified candidate regardless of race.” When asked why Georgia needed a black candidate for Congress, King emphasized class-based unity over racial differences: “Black’s got nothing to do with it. What you and I have in common is our experience, not our skin. I’ve picked cotton at a half a cent a pound. I’ve shaken peanuts for fifty cents a day. That was years ago, but things aren’t much better now.”<sup>50</sup>

King’s platform seemed to emphasize the same types of social legislation that Lyndon Johnson would champion as part of his “Great Society” project. He advocated increasing federal aid for education, providing better job training for youths, retraining for the unemployed, “an increase in the funds set aside for the old, sick, [and] infirm,” and an increase in the minimum-wage law. King anticipated criticisms from the right,

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 619.

<sup>50</sup> “Negro Lawyer Runs for Congress Seat from Georgia,” Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.), *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, 19/0557; Peter de Lissovoy, “Odds on Freedom: Gambler’s Choice in Georgia,” 619.

claiming that “whites on the Hill” would characterize his campaign goals as “communism.” He charged his critics with hypocrisy, arguing that their subsidies to the cotton industries could also be seen as “communism.” “Our women,” he said, “who toil in white kitchens, tend and nurse white children for \$10 and \$12 a week need a subsidy too....”<sup>51</sup>

King’s passionate rhetoric and lofty goals inspired his staff of volunteers who were composed mainly of young SNCC workers, to begin registering black voters in the Second District. Donald Harris, a 23-year-old white college student, took charge of the drive. Because of King’s late entrance into the race on April 4, campaign workers only had a few weeks to register voters before the May 2 deadline. To drum up support for the registration push, King conducted rallies throughout Southwest Georgia. Despite harassment from whites, a lack of funds and personnel, and changing deadlines, King’s army of young SNCC workers successfully registered 2,500 blacks in two weeks. During the final week before the May 2 deadline, workers registered 235 black voters in Albany alone. Blacks now made up twenty percent of the Second District’s registered voters.<sup>52</sup> After the May 2 deadline, state legislators extended the voter registration deadline to July 21, 1964. After the original May 2 deadline passed, SNCC turned its attention to community education and organization. In Albany, SNCC workers had been conducting citizenship and literacy classes at a 5,000-book library center recently established by the Southwest Georgia Project. Most work on the C.B. King campaign had consisted of more

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Roy Shields, Jr., “Overall Report, Southwest Georgia,” *Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972*, 19/0344; Donald Harris, “Re: SNCC, Southwest Project,” SNCC 19/0415, July 12, 1964.

general activities: “talking with community leaders, setting up meetings, and political and voter education.”<sup>53</sup>

In the wake of the Georgia election code revision, SNCC redoubled its voter registration efforts, trying desperately to bolster King’s chances of making a splash in the September primary. SNCC’s staff was stretched thin, with many workers performing several different tasks at a time. In early July, President Johnson signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In response, SNCC initiated desegregation tests in sixty-five establishments throughout Southwest Georgia, which diverted further attention from the King campaign. Donald Harris decried the lack of dedicated voter registration workers, and asked the Atlanta office to provide subsistence funds for new staff members that could help take advantage of the new election code changes. Harris continued to organize the voter registration drive, although he complained that the SNCC staff was “involved in and committed to too many other programs to work voter registration to the extent that it should in order to see satisfying results by September.” Although summer workers couldn’t replicate the results of the April drive, they did manage to successfully register over 1,300 black voters in the month before the election.<sup>54</sup>

King had no illusions about winning the congressional seat, but he remained hopeful his campaign would draw attention to the gross inequalities that pervaded Southwest Georgia. On September 9, 1964, King placed fourth in a field of six candidates, with 9,009 votes. Future president Jimmy Carter would go on to win the Democratic nomination and the Second District House of Representatives seat. “Mr.

---

<sup>53</sup> Donald Harris, “Re: SNCC, Southwest Project,” SNCC 19/0415, July 12, 1964

<sup>54</sup> Harris, “Re: SNCC, Southwest Project,” SNCC 19/0415; “Overall Report,” SNCC 19/0828.

King was aware that he would lose the campaign,” one SNCC worker reported, “but he thought it would help make a political force of the Negroes and create among them a sense of community that goes beyond village lines.”<sup>55</sup>

Although King lost the primary in convincing fashion, the emotional impact of his campaign resonated throughout Southwest Georgia. Not only did he become the first black man to run for Congress since Reconstruction, he also managed to beat two white candidates. Only a few years earlier, such a feat would have seemed impossible. On a more practical level, King’s campaign spurred SNCC workers to conduct an effective grassroots campaign that added thousands of Southwest Georgia’s poor, rural black residents to the voter rolls. The spirited efforts of King’s young campaign staff proved that grassroots organizing remained a vital tool for social change in Southwest Georgia. King’s attempt to build a biracial, class-conscious political coalition that would stand up and demand a change in the status quo struck both black and white voters as being exceptionally progressive for its time. His showing in the Democratic primary also caught the attention of white politicians like Jimmy Carter, who realized that they could no longer ignore or write off the thousands of registered black voters in Southwest Georgia.

In the midst of his campaign, C.B. King had still been working on the school desegregation appeal. Passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act spurred lawyers across the country to file desegregation suits. The largest majority of the cases were brought before the Fifth Circuit Appeals Court in New Orleans. With its appellate calendar becoming quickly clogged, the court decided to give preference to school desegregation cases. The

---

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.



Fifth Circuit Appeals Court began experimenting with new forms of judicial relief, handing out favorable rulings that would accelerate school integration in several districts across the South.<sup>56</sup>

The fate of King's desegregation efforts through the legal system mirrored that of the rest of the South. Despite their efforts, the Fifth Circuit judges found that—"unlike the normal appeals case where the appellate decision is generally accepted as final—school cases were never finished." The same cases would often return after an initial decision, exacting a large amount of judicial time and patience. Each time a case returned to the appeals court, judges were asked to institute more aggressive integration measures and strike down new forms of delay. The Fifth Circuit was continually forced to act on behalf of plaintiffs whose demands had been ignored by federal district court judges. At the district level, many federal judges refused to enforce the law without constant cajoling from above. Very few district court judges had the courage to mandate compliance with the *Brown II* ruling. Most federal district judges, including Albany's J. Robert Elliott, could be classified as passive; they were either unsympathetic, uncaring, or fearful of community backlash.<sup>57</sup>

The Fifth Circuit considered the Albany desegregation suit for the first time in the summer of 1964. On July 31, Judge Elbert P. Tuttle delivered a majority ruling in favor of C.B. King and the Gaines family. While Tuttle agreed that "the requirement for speeding up the plans of desegregation" had to be uniformly applied to all school districts, he claimed that "the degree of such speedup must remain somewhat flexible."

---

<sup>56</sup> Betsy Levin and Willis D. Hawley, *The Courts, social science, and school desegregation* (Transaction Publishers, 1977), 17-18.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Tuttle revised the original desegregation plan proposed by the Dougherty County Board of Education, expanding it to apply to first and second grade children and high school seniors. The new plan would supposedly insure “that every Negro child in the Dougherty County School System have at least an opportunity to enjoy a desegregated education during his school career.”<sup>58</sup>

Tuttle’s revised plan still operated on the “freedom of choice” principle—each student in grades one, two, and twelve would theoretically have the ability to choose where they would attend school. Their choice would be granted, “provided that if there is insufficient space in any school” as a result of making such a choice, “preference in granting such choice shall be solely on the basis of proximity of the child to the school.” Tuttle’s phrasing allowed the school board some latitude in determining which black students would be able to “fit” into the previously all-white Albany High School. Each year, according to Tuttle’s plan, two more grades would be desegregated in the Albany elementary school system (i.e., the next year grades three and four would be integrated and so on). At the same time, Tuttle ordered that one additional grade of Albany High School be desegregated each year. Although King had hoped for a more accelerated schedule, Tuttle’s plan partially met the demands of Albany’s black community while easing the fears held by white parents, teachers, and administrators.<sup>59</sup>

In his dissenting opinion, District Judge Carswell echoed the familiar mantra of the white resistance camp. He charged Judge Tuttle with judicial activism, arguing that “no court should rain down injunctions unless there be some demonstrated factual

---

<sup>58</sup> *Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, 334 F. 2d 983 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1964).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

necessity to insure compliance with the law.” Ignoring the fact that almost ten years had passed since *Brown II* without any desegregation of Albany’s public school system, Carswell claimed that no “factual necessity” existed that would require a modification of the original desegregation plan approved by J. Robert Elliott.<sup>60</sup>

The Fifth Circuit remained busy throughout 1964, overturning “stairstep” plans from all over the South. Three other major cases involving Birmingham and Mobile, Alabama, and Savannah and Brunswick, Georgia were brought before the Fifth Circuit, receiving the same ruling dealt to the Dougherty County School Board. Judge Tuttle’s rulings generally sought to placate white school board members by insisting that the new standards remained flexible while also stressing the importance of uniformity. C.B. King and fellow Movement attorney Charles Stephen Ralston doubted the new plan’s potential effectiveness, and soon filed a motion for relief “seeking a faster schedule of desegregation than the one required by the plan in effect.”<sup>61</sup>

King had good reason to be skeptical of the revised plan: by mid-April 1964, only 81 black children had enrolled in the first or second grades of formerly white schools. The Dougherty County School Board continued to resist integration in subtle ways throughout the 1960s. Over half the applications made in 1964 by black pupils seeking to attend previously all-white schools were denied. Despite black parents’ fears that white

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Levin and Hawley, *The Courts, social science, and school desegregation*, 19; *Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, 392 F. 2d 669 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1968).

students and teachers would bully their children, most black children didn't get in to white schools.<sup>62</sup>

In the aftermath of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Fifth Circuit Court's accelerated desegregation ruling, six young girls began their studies at Albany High, becoming the first African American students to integrate what had been "the premier white school in Dougherty County." Throughout the course of their senior year, the six black students—Mamie Ford, Shirley Lawrence, Beverly Plummer, Eddie Maude Mckendricks, Ruby Neil Singleton, and Joann Christian—faced various forms of intimidation and violence from their fellow white students. The girls didn't receive any better treatment as the year progressed. During the spring semester, members of the Albany High football team surrounded the girls and pelted them with bottles. Similar instances took place throughout the year, but the girls persevered until May, when all six became the first black students to graduate from Albany High.<sup>63</sup>

During the first few years of desegregation in Albany, Movement leaders didn't feel integration was proceeding at a quick enough pace. In a strictly numerical sense, it seemed obvious that school desegregation efforts failed to significantly alter the public school system. In the 1965-1966 school year, 173 black children (2 percent of the total)

---

<sup>62</sup> Chalfen, "The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," 587; Chalfen, "Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965," 59.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Pat Chatmon Perryman, "Back to School/Integration 101," [video recording], January 27, 2011, In possession of Dr. Lee Formwalt, Albany Civil Rights Institute (hereafter cited as ACRI); Chalfen, "The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," 587.

enrolled in previously all-white schools; the state average (including Atlanta) at the time was only 1.5 percent.<sup>64</sup>

But the students kept coming. In 1965, thirty-one teenagers became the first black junior classmen to ever set foot in Albany High School. They expected hostile treatment. On September 7 they attended their first day of school at Albany High. The students entered a building filled with white kids, white teachers, and white administrators who made it well known that the new batch of students were not welcome. According to Mary Jones Wright, the principal, faculty, and student body refused to believe the new students had chosen to transfer of their own free will. “[They believed that] we were outside agitators,” Wright said, “hand-picked to stir up trouble at Albany High School, but this was not the case.”<sup>65</sup>

Members of the class of 1967 came from supportive families with a history of civil rights activism in Albany. Pat Chatmon’s father, Thomas C. Chatmon, had been an active participant in the Albany Movement since its inception. Having run for the Ward Two City Commission post in 1963, he would follow C.B. King’s example by running for Congress in 1970. Robert D. Thomas, Jr.’s father, Robert Thomas Sr., a local community leader and movement veteran who owned and operated a popular barbershop in the Harlem section of town. While the influence of their parents cannot be discounted, Albany High’s black students made the decision to integrate on their own. “We were the

---

<sup>64</sup> Chalfen, “The Way out May Lead In’: The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.,” 587; Chalfen, “Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965,” 60.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Mary Jones Wright, “Back to School/Integration 101,” ACRI.

pioneers of our today,” Robert Thomas claimed, “trying to make a better and brighter future not only for ourselves, but for those that would choose to follow.”<sup>66</sup>

A typical day for the thirty-one African-American students began early in the morning at Lincoln Heights Elementary School, where one school bus would pick up all of Albany High’s black students. On the way to school, students would tell jokes, sing, discuss television shows, and sometimes pray together. “When that bus...turned onto Residence Avenue,” Chatmon said, “the entire bus became quiet, you couldn’t hear a pin drop.” “We would all get up and line up in that aisle like little soldiers...we would deboard the bus every single day into what would feel like a battlefield.”<sup>67</sup>

On entering the school, students would go to their lockers, retrieve their books, and walk to class. “[H]opefully,” Chatmon explained, “no one hits you, bumps you, knocks you to the side before you get to your first class.” The students had to walk down a long hallway to get to their first class. As black students began walking down the hallway, whites huddled against the walls, forcing them to proceed through a gauntlet of verbal abuse. “You would hear remarks,” Mary Jones Wright recalled, “Like, ‘the black birds have landed,’” or, “get your guns boys we’re goin’ coon huntin’.”<sup>68</sup>

The students quickly created a network of mutual support. Students relied on one another for social interaction and emotional comfort. “It was important to have each other’s back,” student Grady Caldwell said. “God had equipped us...to help break down some of the barriers that we were confronted with, and for that, it took teamwork.”

Although treated as outsiders and subjected to intimidation and discrimination on a daily

---

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Robert D. Thomas, Jr., “Back to School/Integration 101,” ACRI.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Pat Chatmon Perryman, “Back to School/Integration 101,” ACRI.

<sup>68</sup> Interviews with Pat Chatmon Perryman and Mary Jones Wright, “Back to School/Integration 101,” ACRI.

basis, Albany's black students banded together to achieve their most coveted mutual goal: graduation. "The solidarity that we had to graduate," Wright said, "remained through our senior year." "All of us had the determination and the fire that 'we will not let these people break us, we will not give in to any of their antics, we will stand, and we will graduate.'"<sup>69</sup>

Male students were met with hostility outside the classroom when they attempted to desegregate the school's athletic teams. In 1965, during his junior year, Grady Caldwell became the first black player to make the varsity football team. At the time, Caldwell was one of only three African American men playing football at traditionally white high schools in the entire state of Georgia. Refusing to be intimidated, Caldwell had confidence and even a sense of superiority, believing that he "was not just as good as," but "better than" his white teammates. His teammates, however, continually attempted to intimidate Caldwell, even going so far as to place a rattlesnake in his locker. Although the snake was dead, Caldwell did not let the issue stand. He found the trainer of the football team and demanded to know who had put the snake in his locker. When the trainer feigned ignorance, Caldwell threatened him, promising that "if anything happened to me, I'm gonna take it out on you."<sup>70</sup>

Not only were Albany High's black student-athletes greeted with hostility from their teammates but from coaches as well. Robert Thomas learned this when he and several other black students attempted to try out for the school basketball team. Traditionally, try-outs for sports teams were held after school. However, Robert Thomas and his friends found out that the varsity basketball coach had changed the try-out time to

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Grady Caldwell and Mary Jones Wright.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Grady Caldwell.

6 a.m., hoping none of the black students learn of the switch. Although the classmates doubted they would make the team, they knew that Thomas, highly regarded as the best basketball player in the school, should make the roster. It came as a shock to Thomas and his friends when they all failed to make the team. Thomas chose to play intramural basketball and dominated the league, easily scoring over twenty points a game. According to Thomas, the school coach would often attend the intramural games to watch him play, but could not bring himself to go against the wishes of the school's white parents and administration.<sup>71</sup>

Over time, however, some players and coaches became more accepting and tolerant of their black teammates. Albany High's head football coach, Harold Dean Cook, who had just been promoted to his position in 1965, served as a sympathetic leader who encouraged acceptance and forward-thinking among his white players. Years later, Grady Caldwell claimed "God had placed" Cook in his position during the 1965 season. "Because it took a Harold Dean Cook," he said, "to manifest a transition" that would change the attitudes of white players and coaches alike. After one particular football game, Coach Cook and his players went to a local restaurant for their post-game meal. Upon entering the restaurant, however, the restaurant manager told Cook his black player would not be allowed to eat there. Without hesitation, Cook replied, "Well if he can't eat, then none of us will eat." "If it had not been for him [Cook]," Caldwell declared, "I probably would not have made the team but may have not only not finished school, but may have ended up in jail."<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Robert D. Thomas, Jr.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Caldwell.



Not all coaches shared Cook's progressive attitude, but his influence on some white players began to show towards the end of the season. One day, while several players were killing time in the locker room, one of Cook's assistant coaches approached the group, failing to notice Caldwell. "Let me tell you a good nigger joke," the coach said: "Have you ever seen 'Afro-Turf'? Bury a hundred niggers up to the neck, and you'll have 'Afro-Turf'." Although infuriated, Caldwell kept his mouth shut and left the room. As soon as he turned to walk away, several of his white teammates got up, and walked off with him.<sup>73</sup>

Although the thirty-one black students of the 1967 class drew support from one another in order to mitigate the harshness of everyday life, they were not always able to avoid conflict with white students. One of Robert Thomas's close friends became a favorite target for white bullies. Eventually, the constant fear of harassment became too much for the student and he started carrying a knife to school for protection. He was often seen practicing with the knife by his fellow classmates. One night, while walking in the hallway after his intramural basketball game, a white student intentionally bumped him. Tired of feeling threatened, the black teenager pulled the knife and lunged. Luckily, Thomas and a few of the boy's friends quickly grabbed him. He was arrested, thrown in the county jail and suspended from school. After his release from jail and serving his suspension, school administrators allowed him to continue his studies, and he eventually graduated as a member of the Albany High School class of 1967.<sup>74</sup>

While Grady Caldwell successfully integrated the athletic department, most black students were not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities. "We couldn't join

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Robert Thomas.

anything,” Pat Chatmon remembered, “we couldn’t join anything that we wanted to do—the chorus, the band—none of those clubs were open to us.” Black students were even prevented from attending the Albany High School prom, forced to attend the prom held for the traditionally black Monroe High School. On rare occasions, however, some students were invited to participate in select activities. Pat Chatmon fondly remembered her excitement on hearing from her drama teacher that she had been selected for a part in the school play. When Chatmon inquired about her role, the drama teacher told her that she would be playing the part of the maid. Stunned and offended, Chatmon refused the role and gave up a potential theatre scholarship at Florida State University for doing so.<sup>75</sup>

Against the wishes of the white community, and despite the verbal, physical, and emotional abuse doled out to them, all thirty-one black students made it through their junior and senior years. On June 5, 1967, they lined up at the Albany High School football stadium, marched on stage, and received their diplomas. “But we didn’t just march that night to graduate,” Chatmon said, “...we not only marched for our dignity; we marched for our respect; we marched for the right to march...but most of all...we marched for our freedom.” Their graduation capped a significant two-year period of transition within the Albany public school system. They were the first black students to spend more than one year at Albany High School and, as a result, their testimonies shed new light on the nature of school desegregation in Albany.<sup>76</sup>

The black class of 1967 represented a new wave of the Albany Movement. Like the six girls that preceded them, they volunteered to transfer. Although students like Chatmon and Thomas came from strong, loving, supportive families, their parents could

---

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., Pat Chatmon Perryman.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

not adequately prepare them for the environment at Albany High School. “Because all we had at the end of the day,” Chatmon said, “was each other.”<sup>77</sup>

Not only did Albany High’s African American students help integrate the school, they also reshaped the minds of white teachers, coaches, and students. They began a process of change that, over time, would change the way white and black students perceived one another. When the head coach of the football team announced to a restaurant manager that he would not tolerate segregation, he exemplified a change in the status quo that would gain momentum throughout the late 1960s. For many white students, Harold Dean Cook’s actions at the diner was the first time they saw a native, white Albanian stand up for racial justice. “Racism is a learned behavior,” Caldwell stated, “and it didn’t just start with the students we were in school with, it started with their parents.” Therefore, teachers like Cook played a crucial role in the fight to alter the racist mindsets of many young, white teenagers at Albany High School.<sup>78</sup>

Although black and white students attended Albany High School together during the late 1960s, Albany’s white leaders continued to successfully forestall the implementation of comprehensive desegregation in the public school system. As scholar Michael Chalfen notes, “Albany’s gradual integration of schools therefore reflected the conservative experience of legal desegregation everywhere in America: some blacks and all whites attended formerly all-white schools.” Whites continued to drag their feet throughout the late 1960s. The popularization of “Freedom of Choice” plans slowed the pace of integration for many years. The scheme adopted by the Dougherty County Board of Education could be more aptly title “Freedom of Transfer.” The burden remained with

---

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, Chatmon-Perryman.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., Caldwell.

the individual black child to seek a transfer to the white school. The failure to make a choice within a relatively short period amounted to a decision to stay put. By 1969, black students comprised less than one-fifth of Albany High School's pupils in grades ten to twelve. De facto school segregation continued in Albany until the 1970s, when the *Swann v. Mecklenburg* ruling held that busing was an appropriate remedy for the problem of racial imbalance in schools.<sup>79</sup>

While Albany's African-American community struggled to put their young students into formerly all-white schools, they continued the fight for equal education throughout the twentieth century. Although white resistance to integration diminished somewhat by the 1970s, it had not disappeared completely. In addition to the problem of inequality in the public school system, both public and private employers continued to discriminate and mistreat black workers throughout the late 1960s. Poverty still pervaded Southwest Georgia, and Albany's black community stood at a crossroads by the end of the 1960s. Realizing the federal government had failed to achieve the goals stated in Johnson's "Great Society" campaign, black leaders began looking for new solutions that would alleviate poverty, end job discrimination, and improve working and living conditions in Southwest Georgia.

---

<sup>79</sup> Chalfen, "The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr.," 587-588; *Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, vol. 392.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“THE MAN WHO OWNS THE LAND OWNS YOU”: THE RISE AND FALL OF  
NEW COMMUNITIES, INCORPORATED

In 1973, motorists driving on Route 19 in the southwest corner of Georgia would pass a sign that read: “Welcome to New Communities: The Land of Pick Your Own.” Founded in 1968 by veterans of the famous “Albany Movement,” New Communities, Incorporated (NCI) promised a grand vision of community uplift. The organization held the largest black-owned piece of land in the country—at nearly 6,000 acres and one-third the size of Manhattan—“Featherfield Farm” seemed to stretch on past the horizon. Its owners drew up astounding blueprints outlining the contours of what they saw as a welcome alternative to the hardscrabble farm life that had left rural blacks undereducated, malnourished, and poor. There would be a school on the premises, as well as a general store, a hospital, a day care center, and many more community and religious services. But hard times soon hit, and NCI found itself struggling to survive. The massive mortgages on the land could not be paid, and bankers and government agents rejected applications for credit and assistance.<sup>1</sup>

The breadth of NCI’s project testified to the destitution and discrimination visited upon the black farmers of the Deep South, as well as the sense of hope that better days must be coming. NCI members held a vision of black power emanating from community

---

<sup>1</sup> “Something Unique and Important: The Southwest Georgia Project,” n.d., 1–2, Newsweek Papers, Box 18, Folder 15, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library (hereinafter referred to as MARBL), Emory University; Kate Pickert, “When Shirley Sherrod Was First Wronged by the USDA,” *Time*, July 23, 2010.

land ownership and economic self-sufficiency. The organization stood against the tide of history, attempting to integrate large and small-scale farming enterprises and create small industries to provide long-term employment within a challenging rural landscape. NCI attempted to marshal the resources of the federal government to revitalize rural southwest Georgia, despite the subtle discrimination practiced by administrators at every level. But NCI's unbridled ambitions could not be realized in the face of determined and insidious white resistance. Poor planning and mismanagement exacerbated NCI's plight. The group bought too much land, knew too little about operating a large farm, struggled to keep its workers happy, and underestimated its obstacles to success.

On the one hand, NCI's story expands on established historical interpretations of the War on Poverty outlining efforts taken by civil rights activists to commandeer federal resources to level the economic playing field between black and white southerners. Early studies focused on the political maneuverings and bureaucratic policy initiatives of the Great Society. More recent studies have redirected the spotlight back to the grassroots, where community leaders attempted to create new service institutions to reverse the economic fortunes of the nation's poor. With too few exceptions, however, these studies have focused on the interplay between urban activists and the federal government. Those who have examined rural areas have not fully taken into account the role that black farmers played in the struggle for economic progress in the hinterlands of the South.

One major effort to fill this historical gap was Pete Daniel's groundbreaking monograph, *Dispossessed*, which explained how the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) discriminatory tactics whittled away the strength and numbers of black farmers over the course of the civil rights era. Daniel described a process of "passive

nullification,” whereby USDA administrators, through all levels of government, employed subtle methods of bureaucratic obfuscation to cut black farmers off from crucial networks of information and assistance. The effects of “passive nullification” cannot be understated, but outside the Washington Beltway, white southerners fought *actively* to preserve their economic supremacy. They recognized, and rightly so, that the embryonic black cooperative movement, by stemming outmigration from rural areas and securing economic autonomy for displaced farmers, threatened to upend the political economy of the southern countryside.<sup>2</sup>

Black farmers responded to the USDA’s indifference by forming agricultural cooperatives across the Deep South. And so the rising black cooperative movement began as an outgrowth of and departure from the civil rights movement. Faced with the threat of being pushed off the farm by a lack of cash or a hostile landlord, African Americans throughout the rural South joined together to negotiate higher crop prices, educate themselves on best farming practices, provide a safe haven for the displaced farmers among them, and appeal to the federal government for the large-scale funding required to finance innovative economic collaborations.

Such grand projects, however, required vast amounts of money, plain and simple, the type of six and seven-figure funding packages that could arrive, perennially, from the nation’s capitol. Or not. Those dollars would have to be allocated by Congress and approved by the Office of Economic Opportunity, but that was only the beginning. Once local whites back home heard rumors that a black organization had received big money from the federal government, an inevitable backlash campaign began. The larger the

---

<sup>2</sup> Pete Daniel, *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights* (UNC Press Books, 2013).

project, the stronger the resistance. But for a brief moment, NCI held the potential to stop the hemorrhaging of the rural black population and recalibrate the agricultural status quo of the Black Belt. Despite their considerable efforts, however, NCI and like-minded activists across the South could not reverse the changing political winds of the late 1960s and early 1970s that limited their financial resources.

New Communities, Inc. and similar organizations failed to deliver on their promises because Richard Nixon's Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) began a retreat from the rural War on Poverty that would never quite be reversed. Black cooperatives withered because they had to rely on a federal agency for their immense startup costs. But the problem wasn't just Nixon. The agency, like any other in Washington, was constantly under attack from southern politicians and their constituents. From the beginning, the OEO had one trump card—the director's ability to override vetoes—vetoes from southern governors like George Wallace and Lester Maddox, politicians whose racism had the power to make genuine attempts at economic revitalization look like imminent black power revolutions.

Ultimately, the structure of the 1965 Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) and conservative backlash to the Great Society slowly suffocated the black cooperative movement and the rural War on Poverty. From its passage, the EOA represented an experimental approach to governance that forced a new discussion about the nature of federalism itself. Legislators and bureaucrats had to determine how much local control was feasible or even desirable in federal programs. As many historians of the War on Poverty have noted, this question—combined with the act's insistence on securing the “maximum feasible participation” of the poor—angered many local politicians, who felt



threatened by the potential empowerment of the disadvantaged. What many have neglected to explore, however, is the inconspicuous role that the states themselves played in the War on Poverty. The ambiguity surrounding the role of the states reflected the Johnson administration's distaste for traditional grants-in-aid, whereby federal dollars were managed by the states under specified conditions. In other words, Lyndon Johnson wanted a pipeline of money, one that flowed directly from Washington to local antipoverty agencies. But he couldn't afford to completely alienate southern Democratic governors, so the EOA was revised to allow them veto power over War on Poverty projects in their state. It was a Faustian political bargain that made Johnson and his policy wonks shudder. Johnson's bill-writing team believed that state administrators could too easily co-opt such programs. Therefore, authors of the bill hoped War on Poverty programs could pierce through the bureaucratic strata to reach the poor directly. Some also worried that conservative southern governors, if given the chance, would use the power of the veto to scuttle any programs that might upset their constituencies—which is exactly what happened.<sup>3</sup>

Early drafts of the bill gave way to several battles over gubernatorial powers. The Johnson administration's 1964 draft bill required gubernatorial consent before any Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) workers could be sent to a state, and encouraged OEO's director to "facilitate effective participation of the states" and to forward project applications to state governors for "comment." In an effort to secure the

---

<sup>3</sup> Roger H. Davidson, "The War on Poverty: Experiment in Federalism," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 385 (1969): 1–13; Martha J. Bailey and Nicolas J. Duquette, "How Johnson Fought the War on Poverty: The Economics and Politics of Funding at the Office of Economic Opportunity," *The Journal of Economic History* 74, no. 2 (June 2014): 351–88.

grudging approval of southern Democrats, EOA authors inserted a last minute provision giving gubernatorial veto powers over Job Corps centers and all nongovernmental contracts, including community action programs. Governors in the conservative Deep South and Sunbelt West used the veto strategically to distance themselves from more liberal organizations. When confronted with the applications of black cooperatives, segregationists like George Wallace and Lester Maddox saw an opportunity to grandstand against government overreach and black power radicalism.<sup>4</sup>

To get an OEO approval to the governor's desk, co-op leaders had to spend an extraordinary amount of time perfecting the art of "grantsmanship"—constructing proposals that fulfilled every bureaucratic requirement and held the right mix of feasibility and ambition to win the approval of key administrators. Rural areas naturally had more of an uphill battle to receive funds than cities did, as OEO chief Sargent Shriver confessed at a 1965 Governors' Conference: "Too often, it has been the big cities that have been able to get the federal money first—because they can attract the experts—because they know how to put together a staff attached to the mayor—and they know the arts of grantsmanship." In short, OEO's bureaucratic procedures and application requirements put the onus on resource-strapped local activists to produce immaculate proposals to receive funding. As a result, budding farm organizations like New Communities spent their early years walking a tight rope, attempting to scale up and become economically viable while struggling to persuade high-level OEO officials and

---

<sup>4</sup> Davidson, "The War on Poverty"; Bailey and Duquette, "How Johnson Fought the War on Poverty."

northern philanthropists to do an end-run around southern politicians determined to block any funding for their projects.<sup>5</sup>

Like many cooperatives, NCI sprouted from the soils of the southern Black Belt, in a quiet farming community just outside of Albany, Georgia. As the direct action phase of the Albany Movement waned in the mid-1960s, most SNCC workers left southwest Georgia, but not Sherrod. After a brief sojourn north to obtain his master's degree in theology, he returned to Albany to focus on alleviating rural poverty in southwest Georgia. Charles and his wife Shirley, along with former Albany Movement President Slater King, began collaborating with Robert Swann, a pioneer of the community land trust movement in the United States. Born in 1918 to a white middle-class family, Swann became involved in the civil rights movement through Bayard Rustin, then-secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Under Rustin's guidance, Swann embraced pacifism while auditing classes at Ohio State University. After completing a prison stint for draft evasion during World War II, Swann spent the next two decades cutting his teeth as a political organizer and antiwar activist. In late 1963, as co-founder of the Committee for Nonviolent Action, Swann organized and took part in a "Walk for Peace"—a mass march from Canada to Cuba<sup>6</sup> to protest nuclear testing and arms proliferation. The group never made it to Guantanamo Bay, but got a taste of the Deep South in Albany, Georgia, where Police Chief Laurie Pritchett, true to form, threw them in jail for marching without a permit. While embroiled in the struggle to gain their release, Swann became close friends with many Albany Movement leaders, most notably Slater King. In 1967, Swann, along with colleagues Ralph Borsodi and Erick Hansch, founded the International

---

<sup>5</sup> Davidson, "The War on Poverty," 4.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, the last leg of the journey would look more like a regatta than a march.

Independence Institute, an organization devoted to publicizing and expanding ideas about rural land reform in the United States. Slater King approached his old friend in 1967 with the idea for NCI, and Swann quickly jumped on board, agreeing to serve as the organization's national coordinator.<sup>7</sup>

Since its foundation, NCI targeted the rural counties surrounding Albany, where savvy bureaucrats worked to preserve white agricultural supremacy. NCI's founders, hardened veterans of the civil rights movement, had seen the USDA turn a cold shoulder to black farmers for years. During the third quarter of the twentieth century, agrigovernment and agribusiness fused together, with drastic consequences for poor farmers. In the decades following World War II, USDA aggressively promoted capital-intensive operations and subsidized wealthy farmers. A startling reconfiguration of the national farm structure followed. Though such policies affected all poor farmers, African Americans suffered most. From 1950 to 1975, the number of African-American-owned farms shrank from over half a million to 45,000. In the 1960s alone, the black farm count in ten southern states dropped from 132,000 to 16,000, an 88 percent decline.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Kirby White, "An Interview with Bob Swann," *Community Economics*, Summer 1992; Robert Swann, *Peace, Civil Rights, and the Search for Community: An Autobiography* (Schumacher Center for New Economics, n.d.), <http://www.centerforneweconomics.org/publications/peace-civil-rights-and-search-community-autobiography>; Stephanie Mills, *On Gandhi's Path: Bob Swann's Work for Peace and Community Economics* (Gabriola Island, BC, 2010); Robert Swann to Harlan Joye, June 4, 1970, National Sharecroppers Fund Papers (hereinafter referred to as NSF Papers), Part Two, Box 54, Folder 50, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University; Danielle McGuire, *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement* (Lexington, Ky., 2011), 178–180; Roger S. Powers, *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from ACT-UP to Women's Suffrage* (London, 2012), 107–109.

<sup>8</sup> Loren Schweninger, "A Vanishing Breed: Black Farm Owners in the South, 1651–1982," *Agricultural History* 63 (Summer 1989): 50–53; Peggy G. Hargis, "Beyond the

USDA's tentacles extended into every county in Georgia, but poor black farmers who reached out for help soon found themselves in a bureaucratic maze that often ended in frustration. Black farmers were typically unable to obtain credit, even for spring planting, much less for tools and supplies. While the civil rights and equal opportunity laws of the mid-1960s reshaped political landscapes and produced token desegregation in the cities, African Americans in the rural outposts of the black belt still lived in a world dominated by white planters, politicians, and bureaucrats. USDA officials at the local, state, and national levels responded to black requests by perfecting the art of "passive nullification"—giving lip service to the principle of equal rights while turning a blind eye to ongoing discrimination. White officials at the Farmers Home Administration (FmHA) and the Federal Land Bank, two prominent USDA financial subsidiaries, routinely denied black loan applications. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service (ASCS), the USDA body in charge of dispensing acreage and crop allotments, remained within the firm grip of prosperous white planters with no desire to share federal benefits with lower class blacks, especially those who took part in civil rights activities.<sup>9</sup>

In an interview given to U.S. Commission on Civil Rights field investigators in the spring of 1964, James Mays described his rocky relationship with the USDA. Mays, a farmer and schoolteacher in Lee County, Georgia, (where NCI's farm would eventually

---

Marginality Thesis: The Acquisition and Loss of Land by African Americans in Georgia, 1880-1930," *Agricultural History* 72 (Spring 1998): 241–62; Daniel, *Dispossession*, xi.

<sup>9</sup> Daniel, *Dispossession*, 34; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Equal Opportunity in Farm Programs: An Appraisal of Services Rendered by Agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture* (Washington, D.C., 1965); Georgia State Advisory Committee, *Equal Opportunity in Federally Assisted Agricultural Programs in Georgia* (Atlanta, 1967); Tadlock Cowan and Jody Feder, *The Pigford Case: USDA Settlement of a Discrimination Suit by Black Farmers*, Congressional Research Service, Report no. RS20430, May 29, 2013.

be located) had secured operating loans from the Leesburg FmHA office in 1959 and 1960. In February 1961 he received another approval, but in March, the incoming county FmHA supervisor canceled the loan, telling Mays that his application had been submitted too late. Mays explained the reversal as retribution for his civil rights activity and his role as a teacher and PTA leader in defending a student essay criticizing the school. Mays, now persona non grata inside the school, was asked to resign in June 1962. He considered it no coincidence when, that fall, FmHA officials denied him yet another loan, questioning his ability to repay and citing a negative character reference. Things worsened for Mays and his family as FmHA denied his next loan application the following year. Unable to obtain credit from FmHA, Mays searched for private lenders outside the county. Two of Mays's brothers, who had worked for SNCC in the summer of 1962, also had no luck obtaining credit from the USDA. When Mays tried to fill ASCS-backed purchase orders at an approved community business, the dealer refused him service, in response to his civil rights activities. The Mays family's experiences highlighted the level of subtle discrimination doled out by USDA and the local business community to African Americans who dared to challenge the southern way of life.<sup>10</sup>

Such stories highlighted the disconnect between urban and rural civil rights movements in the Deep South. While towns like Albany saw incremental progress towards public desegregation and black enfranchisement, beyond the city lights lay a patchwork of rural enclaves where segregation was not only largely unchallenged but reinforced by heavy doses of white violence and intimidation. As a young graduate student canvassing southwest Georgia in the summer of 1969, Taylor Branch observed

---

<sup>10</sup> Daniel, *Dispossession*, 39.

the “farcical tragedy of law and order in the black belt,” whose operation relied on the “exclusion of black people from even a sniff of fairness.” Jim Crow seemed alive and well in these country hamlets, where the enforcement of segregation divided “balcony from ground floor in theaters and courtrooms, front from back in laundromats, and white from black in hospitals,” which were “rife with tales of bed switching or employees’ jumping into beds when the inspectors come.”<sup>11</sup>

The perpetuation of such personal, informal discrimination in the southwest Georgia countryside ground black progress to a snail’s pace. By 1969, the region beyond Albany’s borders remained in the clutches of the traditional white power structure. Although the Voting Rights Act had eliminated most legal obstacles to the franchise, black fears of white retaliation discouraged most from entering the registrar’s office. “People told me whether they registered to vote depended on what the boss would say,” Sherrod recalled, “I decided that the man who owns the land owns you.” By 1969, only 30 percent of southwest Georgia’s eligible black voters had registered. As a result, rural white politicians, policemen, and businessmen stood in solidarity to oppose black progress. Perhaps most importantly, the threat of police brutality worked to undermine other governmental protections and services by promising violent retaliation upon those who sought to take advantage of federal poverty programs or sue for equal treatment from their employers. This was the world that New Communities, Inc. hoped to transform.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Taylor Branch, “Black Fear: Law and Justice in Rural Georgia,” *Washington Monthly*, January 1970, (quotation on p. 51).

<sup>12</sup> Branch, “Black Fear,” 52, 58; Charles Postell, “New Communities’ Farm Gets New Lease on Life,” Albany (Ga.) *Albany Herald*, March 17, 1974, (quotation on p. 19A).

The combined pressure of discrimination from government agents and white landowners provided NCI with a large target audience. NCI appealed to displaced rural blacks who had been kicked off the land for attending civil rights meetings. “They had been thrown off the plantation,” Sherrod remembered, “and they didn’t have nowhere to go, nothing to eat...and so it weighed hard on my heart, having been the one who instigated them coming to the meeting.” Sherrod sermonized often on the romantic qualities of the land, deeming it “the source of all power,” and “the source of life.” Speaking at the end of the 1960s, Sherrod lamented the lack of black progress after the abolition of de jure segregation. But Sherrod, as always, managed to find a positive message, insisting that, “we’ve never won. In another sense, we’ve never lost. Because a people who are trodden underfoot—any attempt to get from under the foot of this white man, this white racist, in southwest Georgia, is a success.”<sup>13</sup>

Others involved in the project betrayed a more jaded view of race relations in the region. Their realism illustrated the sobering truth that civil rights activists in southwest Georgia and across the country in the post-LBJ era were realizing—that the expanded access provided by the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act did little to alleviate the economic and extralegal constraints on their lives. In the face of those constraints, many black activists, like SWGP leader Randy Battle, shifted their rhetoric from integration to black pride, from civic participation to economic autonomy. According to Battle, by 1964 African Americans began an honest dialogue about their true desires. “Because by then you had the hamburger stand and the movie theaters and the restaurants and the motels,”

---

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Charles Sherrod, Albany, Ga., July 27, 2012. In author’s possession (Sherrod quotation no. 1 on tape); *One More River To Cross*, Glen Percy Productions (2012), available to view online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAz18fs02fY>, (Sherrod quotation no. 2 @ 6:36, no. 3 @ 8:10).



he recalled, "...the emphasis started to be put on 'black and proud,' that it wasn't so much being able to mix it up with white folk...it was what you thought of yourself." Battle ignored the biblical message to love one's enemies, insisting that "I don't feel like you can tell me to love everybody, and that I'm the only one loving myself...I think that what younger black folks say is that the time has come now that we talk about blackness and only blackness."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the emphasis on racial solidarity, NCI drew much of its resources and inspiration from liberal whites. In 1968, Slater King helped organize an excursion to Israel in order to study the collective farming methods being successfully conducted in the area. King and Sherrod found inspiration for their project through the Moshavim Movement, a method employed in Israel to relocate thousands of migrants after 1948. Under this strategy, individual families would cultivate small plots of land on their own and also cooperatively farm large tracts of land. The individual families would then each receive a portion of the profits from the cooperatively farmed land based on the number of hours they worked.<sup>15</sup>

NCI followed in the footsteps of an older agricultural cooperative based in the region, Koinonia Farm. Founded by a pair of liberal Southern Baptist couples in 1942, Koinonia sat on 400 acres rural farmland in neighboring Sumter County. Envisioned as a communal living space where members pooled their resources and shared equally, Koinonia served as a rare example of interracial cooperation in the Deep South.

---

<sup>14</sup> *One More River to Cross* (Battle quotations @ 14:15).

<sup>15</sup> "Report by Robert Swann on the Trip to Israel, June 23 to July 7, 1968," 1968, Box 1, Folder 25, Slater King Papers, Fisk University Special Collections; Robert S. Swann, *The Community Land Trust: A Guide to a New Model for Land Tenure in America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 16–19; Sherrod, *The Courage to Hope*, 83–84.

Koinonia's founders presaged NCI's future message of economic development as a means to bring about racial progress. "Lincoln emancipated the Negro politically," Jordan claimed, "but not economically. He remains an economic slave, and he doesn't want to vote as much as he wants to eat." When direct-action protests erupted in Albany during the early 1960s, Koinonians formed a cautious alliance with local protestors. Though proud of their role in aiding these local campaigns, behind closed doors many members struggled to reconcile their meek pacifism with the aggressive tactics employed by the young activists. Jordan and most of the older members felt uncomfortable with the idea of direct-action protest. Complaints ranged from an aversion to breaking the law to the need to protect the lives of young protestors. More conservative members took issue with the sexual proclivities of the SNCC students. Above all, Koinonia could not find a way to reconcile its interracial pacifism with SNCC's growing emphasis on Black Power. Whatever their objections, Koinonians had never seemed entirely comfortable taking part in the civil rights movement, and by 1965, they effectively retreated from organized protests.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Stephen Arneson, "A Case Study of a Proposed New Community in Lee County, Georgia" (M.A. Thesis, University of Georgia, 1971), pp. 12, 16; Diana Smith, "Social Experiment Remains Alive," Harlan (Ky.) *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, February 28, 1984, p. 14; Postell, "New Lease on Life," p. 19; Charles S. O'Connor, "The Politics of Industrialization and Interracialism in Sumter County, Georgia: Koinonia Farm in the 1950s," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 89 (Winter 2005), 505–27; Andrew S. Chancey, "'A Demonstration Plot for the Kingdom of God': The Establishment and Early Years of Koinonia Farm," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (Summer 1991): 321–53; Tracy K'Meyer, "'What Koinonia Was All about': The Role of Memory in a Changing Community," *Oral History Review* 24 (Summer 1997): 3–4; Andrew S. Chancey, "Race Religion, and Agricultural Reform: The Communal Vision of Koinonia Farm," in *Georgia in Black and White: Explorations in the Race Relations of a Southern State, 1865-1950*, John Inscoe, ed., (Athens, Ga., 1994), 246–65; Tracy K'Meyer, *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm* (Charlottesville, Va., 1997), 149–157 (quotation on 149).

Despite its captivating story as an interracial, liberal Baptist commune, Koinonia served more as a shining example of the potential to create the “beloved community” than as a reflection of a larger Deep South movement. NCI, on the other hand, joined a burgeoning group of black agricultural cooperatives springing up across the South in the late 1960s. In 1961, Father Albert J. McKnight, a black priest, social activist, and future NCI board member, established the Southern Consumers Cooperative (SCC) in Lafayette, Louisiana, one of the first major cooperatives. It boasted 12,000 members by 1968. Most cooperatives, however, grew from the civil rights and black power movements, taking shape as a noticeable trend only after 1964 with financial assistance from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and the Ford Foundation. By the time NCI came into existence, forty black cooperatives operated across the country, controlled democratically by a membership of 12,000 families, most of whom lived in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. The establishment of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives (FSC) and the Southern Cooperative Development Program (SCDP) in 1967 provided black co-ops with new sources of technical and financial assistance. The two organizations merged three years later, and by the mid-1970s the Federation’s membership included 130 different co-ops across the Deep South.<sup>17</sup>

NCI’s closest role model lay roughly four hours away in the black belt counties of southwest Alabama. Established in 1967 by veterans of the Selma Movement, the Southwest Alabama Farmers Cooperative Association (SWAFCA) quickly became the crown jewel of the Federation, acting on behalf of 1,800 families spread across ten counties of southwest Alabama. True to its civil rights origins, the Alabama organizers

---

<sup>17</sup> Michael Miles, “Black Cooperatives,” *The New Republic*, September 21, 1968, p. 21.

envisioned the creation of a new economic base that would free the region's black population from white control, allowing its members to vote for the candidate of their choice without fear of reprisal. Through agricultural education and cooperative economic assistance, the organization would allow black farmers to expand out of cotton and corn into more lucrative truck (perishable vegetable) crops.<sup>18</sup>

While SWAFCA's long-term goals attracted attention throughout the South, its ability to procure federal funding showed potential imitators like NCI that perhaps Washington had finally taken an interest in turning back the tide of black poverty and land loss in the Deep South. But as SWAFCA and NCI would discover, each dollar promised from Capitol Hill had to travel through a gauntlet of opposition from local, state, and federal elected officials. When news broke of a potential half-million dollar OEO grant for SWAFCA, streams of complaints rushed forward. Selma Mayor Joe Smitherman assembled a who's who of Alabama's white political and economic elite to lobby against the group. Behind closed doors, probate judges, corporate executives, and the entire Alabama congressional delegation took turns bending the ears of OEO administrators, painting SWAFCA as a subversive, militant group of radicals aiming to destabilize the region's political economy and place southwest Alabama under Black Panther rule. SWAFCA pressed forward, mounting its own lobbying campaign to assure OEO officials of the project's merit. Their work paid off on May 11, 1967, when OEO awarded SWAFCA with a \$399,967 demonstration grant, provided that its board

---

<sup>18</sup> Susan Youngblood Ashmore, *Carry It On: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 1964-1972* (Athens, Ga., 2008), 198–201; Bruce J. Reynolds, "A History of African-American Farmer Cooperatives, 1938-2000," Presentation at the Annual Meeting of the NCR-194, October 31, 2001, 13–15; Miles, "Black Cooperatives" pp. 21-22; F. Ray Marshall and Lamond Godwin, *Cooperatives and Rural Poverty in the South* (Baltimore, 1971), 43–51.

members clear FBI background checks and allow local government agents to monitor them like hawks. Any federal dollar sent to the Deep South, especially funds earmarked for African-American ventures, had to overcome an inevitable veto from the governor. As expected, Alabama governor Lurleen Wallace (i.e., George Wallace, who effectively ran the state behind his wife as a puppet executive) signed the veto on June 8, describing SWAFCA as “a violent Black Power organization...whose leaders called for the assassination of me, my husband, and my child.” Co-op leaders pushed ahead anyways, planting over 2,000 acres of crops in the face of intense harassment until July 5, when OEO chief Sargent Shriver overrode Wallace’s veto. In his explanation to Alabama Senator Lister Hill, Shriver insisted that OEO had found no links between SWAFCA and SNCC, or any “anti-American groups,” and argued that caving in to the local opposition would only encourage obstruction for future projects.<sup>19</sup>

Like SWAFCA, NCI found that publicizing its plans elicited intense white resistance. Conceiving “new communities” proved simple compared to the monumental task of acquiring and maintaining the farm. Buying a large tract of land for a black-run institution like NCI was difficult. The sale had to be conducted secretly in order to minimize opposition from local whites. Doubting that the land would be sold at any price if the owners discovered their plans, NCI leaders concealed their designs for the farm. Slater King, a prominent Albany realtor and generally regarded as the organizational guru of the project, led the search for NCI’s future home. Finding suitable acreage in southwest Georgia’s shrinking agricultural landscape proved difficult. In 1945,

---

<sup>19</sup> Ashmore, *Carry It On*, 218–232 (quotation on 229); Reynolds, “A History of African-American Farmer Cooperatives, 1938-2000”; Miles, “Black Cooperatives,” pp. 21-22; Marshall and Godwin, *Cooperatives and Rural Poverty*, 43–51.

Dougherty County contained 895 farms, but when King began his search in 1969, only 251 remained. In nearby Lee County, where NCI would later settle, only 244 farms remained, down from 964 in 1945. Gone were the days of the small, labor-intensive practices of the yeoman farmer, long since replaced by large-scale, mechanized operations. In the early postwar years, average farm sizes in the region hovered between 200 and 300 acres. By 1969, the average farm in southwest Georgia boasted over 600 acres. NCI's leaders, determined to create a community that could serve the needs of the entire region, decided to defy the averages, purchasing nearly 6,000 acres.<sup>20</sup>

After finding their land—a 5,785-acre former plantation in Lee County they dubbed “Featherfield Farm”—King and NCI board members traveled in desperate search for funding. Fay Bennett, NCI board member and head of the National Sharecroppers Fund (NSF), cobbled together the \$50,000 to purchase a one-year option on the land at a total sale price of \$1,080,000. This left the board members one year to find one million dollars. As a member of the richest black family in Albany and a graduate of Fisk University, King turned to his wealthy friends for assistance. One of those friends was Chester Carlson, a liberal white philanthropist and founder of the Xerox Corporation. In the twilight of his life, Carlson had been silently giving away his fortune for years, fulfilling his ambition “to die a poor man.” Carlson expressed interest in the project, and agreed to donate the money on the condition that NCI's board of directors meet with the Fellows at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions. The members agreed, and flew out immediately to Santa Barbara, California, for an evening meeting. But before the

---

<sup>20</sup> Print Procedure, Georgia Statistics Service, Lee County (# of farms), Dougherty County (# of farms), <http://www.georgiastats.uga.edu/timeseries1.html>

meeting began, their liaison pulled them aside to deliver the bad news—Chester Carlson had died suddenly a few hours before.<sup>21</sup>

Stunned but undeterred, NCI dispatched Sherrod to work the northern charity circuit again. NCI's donor list boasted a large cross-section of liberal business elites, politicians, and prominent civil rights leaders. Among their supporters were names like Nelson Rockefeller, Jackie Robinson, Julian Bond, Ralph Abernathy, Jesse Jackson, Vernon Jordan, Coretta Scott King, John Lewis, Andrew Young, Wyatt Tee Walker, and Ella Baker. A consummate salesman, Sherrod adjusted his sales pitch to fit his intended audience. The detailed minutes of a 1969 NCI Fundraising Committee meeting outlined Sherrod's modus operandi: "Sherrod suggested a mass-media approach to fund-raising, employing such techniques as the 'sob-appeal,' the 'Success story,' the appeal of 'keeping the niggers in the South,' or 'ending the urban problem at the source.'" While Sherrod's methods proved fruitful in the short-term, each check that rolled in for a few thousand dollars reminded NCI leaders that without significant institutional or government backing, the project would sputter.<sup>22</sup>

Help finally arrived in the form of a \$98,324 OEO impact grant that would be used to conduct several studies to determine the feasibility of the project and fund miscellaneous expenses, but could not be used to help finance the land. NCI cobbled together the money needed to secure the land at the last minute from a variety of sources, including Prudential Insurance, which provided the lion's share of the funding with a

---

<sup>21</sup> Swann, *Peace, Civil Rights, and the Search for Community*, Ch. 20: "New Communities—5,000 Acres and \$1,000,000"; David Owen, *Copies in Seconds: Chester Carlson and the Birth of the Xerox Machine* (New York, 2004), 259–283.

<sup>22</sup> New Communities, Inc., "Save the Land in '76—Partial List of Supporters," *Newsweek Papers*, Box 18, Folder 15, MARBL; "NCI Fundraising Committee Minutes," August 25, 1969, Box 56, Folder 10, NSF Papers.

\$625,000 loan. With the deed now in hand, the board of directors began to distill their language of black economic uplift into a concrete set of goals. NCI leaders wanted to help displaced farmers by putting them to work on the land. They planned to improve standards of education, medical care, and housing. In order to expand educational opportunities for its residents, NCI planned to build day care centers, kindergartens, and after-school programs for older students. NCI leaders hoped to eventually create a private school system encompassing preschool through junior college. They also planned to construct a community health center that would provide instructional programs, teaching residents everything from personal hygiene to nutrition.<sup>23</sup>

Self-sufficiency had to be achieved if NCI hoped to survive in a region where most actively wished for its failure. To this end, members would take part in several economic enterprises to defray costs of the many proposed services, provide employment, and foster the future growth of the organization. The majority of NCI's income would come from profits obtained through the sale of excess crops produced on the farm. Such profits seemed possible at the time, as black-owned food distribution centers that catered to minority groups were emerging in urban cities like Detroit, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles. NCI board members hoped to procure contracts from these businesses for vegetables, melons, nuts, and fruits.<sup>24</sup>

In 1970, NCI leaders expected to provide full-time employment for a manager, four tractor drivers, and five general workers. Approximately 75 percent of NCI's

---

<sup>23</sup> "New Town Planned in Georgia Community Capitalism Project" (Office of Economic Opportunity, July 16, 1969), Part Two, Box 56, Folder 10, NSF Papers; Arneson, "Proposed New Community in Lee County," 17.

<sup>24</sup> OEO, "New Town Planned in Georgia"; Arneson, "Proposed New Community in Lee County," 23.



workforce would consist of seasonal laborers committed to harvesting crops and conducting menial chores. After completing the proposed four-year agricultural development program, NCI board members hoped to extend full-time employment to fifty additional workers. Eighty additional jobs were projected for 1972, after finishing construction on a planned sewing plant. NCI also expected to add twenty additional workers for positions in retail services, and administration of the local government. By 1974, residents would be employed to staff an on-site grocery store and gas station. With an influx of residents, new jobs would be required to serve the basic needs of the community, such as barbers, beauticians, and repairmen. A city manager would be required to coordinate police protection, garbage pick-up, and other necessary functions. NCI projected 150 jobs for full-time farm residents by 1974.<sup>25</sup>

The achievement of such wide-eyed goals ultimately hinged on the organization's ability to convince OEO bureaucrats to bend Georgia's white power structure to their will. NCI leaders hoped to duplicate the success of other co-ops, like SWAFCA, that had gamed the system against all odds to acquire the big federal money so essential to their survival. But that was 1967, and this was 1969. In the years since SWAFCA's triumph, the liberal consensus crystallized by Lyndon B. Johnson's historic 1964 landslide had shattered. Alienated and angered by the wave of urban race riots, rust-belt suburbanites and blue-collar bungalow-dwellers formed a new "Silent Majority" that resurrected Richard Nixon from the political graveyard and installed him in the White House. In exchange for their vote, Nixon promised to restore law and order, curb inflation, win the war in Vietnam, and trim the fat from the supposedly bloated War on Poverty programs.

---

<sup>25</sup> OEO, "New Town Planned in Georgia"; Arneson, "Proposed New Community in Lee County," 39–40.

To streamline the War on Poverty, Nixon called for a “New Federalism” that would redistribute federal power accrued through the Great Society back to state and local governments.<sup>26</sup>

The foundation for Nixon’s overhaul of the Great Society was laid in the 1966 midterm elections that netted forty-seven new GOP seats in the House of Representatives. Conservative southern Democrats and Republicans responded to the rightward tilt of the electorate by promising voters they would straighten out the controversial Community Action Program (CAP), which many blamed for the growing trend of racial unrest in the cities. Created through the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, the Community Action Program funneled federal dollars to local Community Action Agencies, which would use the money to design and implement their own antipoverty programs. Understanding that southern bureaucrats could not be trusted to carry out programs intended to disrupt the racial order, Lyndon Johnson’s bill writers struck a compromise with southern Democrats that allowed the Community Action Program to provide funds to both local governments and nonprofit agencies. To further delegate power to the local level, Congress mandated “maximum feasible participation” by the community in the planning and implementation of antipoverty programs. While noble in its conception, critics accused “maximum feasible participation” of provoking racial riots across the country. In 1967, a strengthened conservative coalition pushed

---

<sup>26</sup> Wesley G. Phelps, *A People’s War on Poverty: Urban Politics and Grassroots Activists in Houston* (Athens, Ga., 2014), 153–158; James Williams, “OEO: The Big Gun of the War on Poverty Didn’t Die, It Just Faded Away,” *Black Enterprise*, (January 1973), pp. 23–27; Joan Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered* (New York, 1995), 60–63; Irwin Unger, *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon* (New York, 1996), 331–332; Ashmore, *Carry It On*, 278–279.

through the Green Amendment, stipulating that local officials held sole power for granting Community Action Agency designations to community organizations. Congress soon followed with the Quie Amendment, which reshaped the Agency boards, mandating that one-third of the board be filled by elected officials, one-third by private sector representatives, and one-third by community members.<sup>27</sup>

Liberal Democrats and southern black leaders shuddered at the thought of returning control of antipoverty dollars to state and local agencies that had worked tirelessly to thwart projects that threatened to upset the South's social and racial caste system. Nixon installed some of his closest allies into top OEO positions. To head OEO, Nixon tapped Donald Rumsfeld, an ambitious 36-year-old Republican congressman from Illinois who had voted against the agency's creation in 1964. Not willing to take the political risk of rolling back the War on Poverty in his first term, Nixon relied on a different strategy—appointing officials critical of OEO to key posts and allowing them to gradually whittle down the organization's size and budget in the years to come.<sup>28</sup>

While Nixon used “dog whistle” racial appeals to rile up his base, at the Georgia statehouse no coded language was needed. In 1966, Lester Maddox, a fire-breathing segregationist known mainly for chasing black patrons away from his fried chicken emporium with a pistol and an ax-handle, dismayed Atlanta moderates by winning a tight gubernatorial race against Republican Congressman Bo Callaway. Unlike Nixon and

---

<sup>27</sup> David Zarefsky, *President Johnson's War On Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005), 170–173, 131–132; Steven D. Soifer et al., *Community Economic Development in Social Work* (New York, 2014), 118–119; Ashmore, *Carry It On*, 29–30.

<sup>28</sup> Phelps, *A People's War on Poverty*, 153–158; Williams, “OEO: The Big Gun of the War on Poverty,” pp. 23–27; Hoff, *Nixon Reconsidered*, 60–63; Unger, *The Best of Intentions*, 331–332; Ashmore, *Carry It On*, 278–279.

Rumsfeld, Maddox did not disguise his hostility toward OEO, claiming that the agency doled out government checks to “criminals, communists, looters, burners, anarchists, and countless other enemies of this country.” Maddox called for nothing short of abolishing OEO and its sister agencies, like the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) that were “committing treason against the United States of America.” Needless to say, NCI leaders had little doubt over how Lester Maddox would react when their grant applications crossed his desk.<sup>29</sup>

Back in southwest Georgia, local white opposition also stiffened. Nightriders fired on one NCI house, and volunteers complained of repeated harassment from their neighbors. Things continued to spiral downward for NCI, as its leaders learned that Slater King—the financial and organizational brains of the project—had been killed in a car wreck. Local bureaucrats continued to pressure NCI by choking off government funding. In 1969, an OEO-backed study produced a detailed proposal, prescribing a five-year funding package costing \$1.2 million. NCI leaders claimed that OEO officials led them to believe they would follow up with a \$1 million grant that would provide the organization with enough capital to put a large down payment on the land and fund their farming program. In 1970, however, OEO lowered its proposed funding of NCI to less than \$100,000. Southwest Georgia’s white residents remained opposed to funding NCI

---

<sup>29</sup> Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York, 1995), 347–349; Tim S. R. Boyd, *Georgia Democrats, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Shaping of the New South* (Gainesville, FL, 2014), 132; Bradley R. Rice, “Lester Maddox and the Politics of Populism,” in *Georgia Governors in an Age of Change: From Ellis Arnall to George Busbee*, Harold P. Henderson and Gary L. Roberts, eds., (Athens, Ga., 1988), 195–200; Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, 2005), 220–233; Lester Maddox, *Addresses of Lester Garfield Maddox, Governor of Georgia, 1967-1971.*, Frank Daniel, ed., (Atlanta, 1971), 291, 437.

altogether, branding the project as an unwelcome form of communism. At one crucial meeting, Robert J. Clinton, executive director of the Southwest Georgia Community Action Council, noted that if the council was going to deny funding to NCI, it would first have to “come up with a reason” to do so. The council, backed by southwest Georgia’s well-to-do bankers, farmers, and state officials, bluntly advised the governor to veto the \$98,324 OEO planning grant.<sup>30</sup>

Maddox, who referred to NCI as “Sharecropper City,” quickly vetoed the grant, serving a rude awakening to NCI leaders who had assumed, perhaps naively so, that funding would roll in without delay. “We were very hurt and felt mislead,” said NCI’s executive director, Cellestine Hill. “It set us back,” she added, “all indications were that things were going fine for the grant.” Maddox’s veto put the responsibility of dealing with the organization on Donald Rumsfeld. Rumsfeld had three options: he could override Maddox’s veto, circumvent it by issuing a special impact grant, or let the veto stand. As Rumsfeld deliberated, the Ford Foundation agreed to provide a stopgap \$30,000 loan and a \$20,000 grant to keep NCI afloat. Soon thereafter, Rumsfeld decided to quietly abandon the project, arguing that OEO’s funds could be better spent elsewhere. After Rumsfeld and Maddox made it clear that neither OEO nor the rest of the federal government could be counted on for support, NCI leaders scrambled to finance their debts through private lenders.<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> Jack Anderson, “Death of a Dream,” Prescott (Az.) *Prescott Courier*, November 15, 1970, p. 4; Associated Press, “Poverty Project For Georgia Blacks in Danger of Collapse,” Daytona (Fl.) *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, February 28, 1972, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> AP, “Poverty Project For Georgia Blacks in Danger of Collapse,” 5; Anderson, “Death of a Dream,” p. 4.

The combination of King's death and Maddox's uncontested veto stunned the organization, and forced the remaining leadership to step up and deal with the impending labor shortage on the farm. In July 1970, after realizing they did not have enough workers to harvest the summer's crop of peanuts, cucumbers, and watermelons, NCI leaders put out the call for volunteers. Thirty young people, mostly white college students from Boston University, Harvard University, and University of California at Berkeley, answered the call. The young volunteers, known as "The Georgia Brigade," lived with black families in the area and worked long days in the hot summer fields of southwest Georgia. The idealistic youths were convinced that NCI promised an exciting alteration of the region's socioeconomic landscape. One of the students, Petra Szonyl, told reporters that it was "hard to adjust to the heat and the work," but the farm was "a fantastic idea, one of the most exciting economic visions in the country." The busloads of white northern college students soon realized they could not handle the tough workload. "It was very eye-opening," one student remembered, "I remember some of these kids, they had about two days of that and just hitchhiked home."<sup>32</sup>

Many of the young workers became disillusioned with the project. They complained about the heat, the lack of organization, the bloated expectations, and the tensions between black leaders and white workers. They wondered why they had to sign a pledge to abstain from drugs and sex, or why they were working the land instead of the local black sharecroppers NCI wanted to save. Flyers had claimed 200 black families already lived on Featherfield Farm but when they arrived the students found only a few

---

<sup>32</sup> Anderson, "Death of a Dream," p. 4. Jack Anderson, "Youth Filling Summer with Meaningful Work," Lewiston (Me.) *Lewiston Daily Sun*, July 30, 1970, p. 4; Jack Anderson, "Young Idealists Find Constructive Projects," Spokane (Wa.) *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, July 30, 1970, p. 4.

hired tractor drivers and dilapidated houses. Sherrod insisted that the need for outside labor was only temporary. Once a few successful harvests came in and the mortgage payments became more manageable, local sharecroppers would feel more comfortable taking the leap. For now, however, the students were needed to pull weeds in the peanut fields.<sup>33</sup>

“The Georgia Brigade” did not take well to grueling farm work in sweltering 100-degree weather. “They bitched and itched,” one Lee County native mused while watching the students cut thorny okra, their hands covered in Playtex gloves. Several passed out from heat exhaustion, and most found no escape from the ubiquitous phalanxes of mosquitoes, or the constant feeling of dirtiness that only briefly subsided after a cold shower. To encourage the students, Sherrod regaled them with tales of the providential watermelon harvest on the horizon. The harvest would easily bring 100,000 melons, he said, and the money from their sale would help NCI take control of its own destiny. Without a successful sale of their first major crop, NCI would have a chance of survival. Sherrod’s projections proved to be way off the mark, however; NCI’s first major harvest turned into a comedy of errors. The crop had been planted two weeks late, so when peak price hit in early July, the biggest watermelon brokers would be in the Carolinas already and unwilling to double back for one farm’s harvest. With few ties to the southern market, NCI set about courting sympathetic northern church groups and purchasing cooperatives that would pay above market value for a good cause. By July 12, NCI’s rank-and-file had been informed that they would no longer have to worry about finding a

---

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Golden, *Watermelon Summer: A Journal* (Philadelphia, 1971), 50–51.

market for 100,000 watermelons, as it had been determined that the farm would yield no more than 10,000 that summer.<sup>34</sup>

NCI made hasty arrangements to dispose of the melons. First, they called the Nation of Islam, which owned a sizeable farm in nearby Terrell County. The Nation of Islam farmers agreed to take their pick of the harvest for one penny per pound. After selling a couple hundred pounds, NCI hoped to market the rest to a large corporate buyer. Their next suitor, the Safeway grocery store chain, took a few thousand melons at 1.3 cents per pound to sell in Baltimore at the bloated price of ninety-nine cents each. Despite this turn of good fortune, most of the melons had yet to be sold. With their backs against the wall, Sherrod decided to throw the rest in a U-Haul truck and have two students drive them up north to sell wherever they could. The two students took off in the middle of the night, hoping to drive straight through to New York City, where the watermelons could be sold in bulk for higher prices to local shop owners, or by the slice to overheated inner-city youths. The two set out north on Route 19 around midnight and drove through the night in alternating shifts until they ran into a weigh station outside of Durham, North Carolina. Paranoia set in upon realizing that in their haste to leave town, they had forgotten to weigh their load. A North Carolina trooper soon confirmed their fears, informing them that they were several thousand pounds overweight, a ninety-seven dollar blunder.<sup>35</sup>

With a bloated truck and another weigh station awaiting them at the North Carolina-Virginia border, the students set out to lighten their load by 5,000 pounds.

---

<sup>34</sup> Golden, *Watermelon Summer*, 62, 89–90; Postell, “New Communities’ Farm Gets New Lease on Life,” p. A19.

<sup>35</sup> Golden, *Watermelon Summer*, 113–117.



Armed with a fistful of dimes, they called all over town until they found Henry Smith, a black grocer reputed to be “a real people’s friend.” They told him all about the black-owned farm back in Georgia that would benefit from his purchase, but Smith offered just thirty dollars for 200 melons—about three-fifths of a cent per pound. Smith claimed he already had more melons than he knew what to do with, and theirs were much smaller than the ones he was already struggling to sell. The students talked him up to forty dollars for 200 melons, only to find out after leaving that they had been duped. Smith planned on getting one dollar each for their melons from his customers, who understood that these “Congo” melons were much sweeter and juicier than Smith’s “Charleston Grays.” Still overweight after their unfortunate fleecing, the two journeyed farther north to Richmond, where in between beer breaks and conversations with local farmers, they sold melons out of the back of the truck. By eight o’clock the next morning they had unloaded enough melons to pass inspection, and by ten o’clock they were back on the road to New York City.<sup>36</sup>

Selling watermelons to New York shopkeepers proved to be a difficult task. The students learned the hard way not to turn down a wholesale offer of a dollar or more per melon, no matter where they were. With fruit moving in and out of the city rapidly, the bottom of the market could collapse at any moment. It seemed no one wanted their smaller melons, and those who showed initial interest often backed away after cutting through the green rind to find a severely under-ripe or rotting fruit. The mixed quality of

---

<sup>36</sup> Golden, *Watermelon Summer*, 118–120; Postell, “New Communities’ Farm Gets New Lease on Life”; Charles Postell, “Tough Going for a Black Dream,” *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*, November 3, 1974, pp. 53–54, Information and Research Department, Part 1, Box 28, Folder 22, United Farm Workers Papers, Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University (hereinafter cited as UFWP).

their payload resulted from the unfortunate fact that the NCI workers who tested the melons had virtually no idea how to judge their ripeness. Bad news compounded when NCI leaders called to tell them that the eleventh-hour Safeway deal had fallen through upon inspection of the melons, leaving NCI with a sizeable trucking fee to pay. The two spent the rest of the week selling melons from the back of the truck in Brooklyn and Manhattan, netting a decent profit at one to two dollars per melon. As the two wrapped up their operation, they received one more promising lead. Through mutual friends, the students lined up an opportunity to sell watermelon for two nights at the Fillmore East, which was set to host the popular band “Grand Funk Railroad.” The concert became one of their most profitable undertakings, as sweat-drenched college kids flocked to their table to pay a quarter for a slice of melon, throwing the occasional donation in as well. After wrapping up their last big sale, the students sent a check for 700 dollars back to NCI, and left for home. Looking back at the end of the week, NCI worker and watermelon salesman Jeffrey Golden shared his concerns about the project, noting that, “the farm has to get bigger, faster, and smarter in a hurry if it plans to turn the business of raising food into a business instead of a nonstop seed-to-sale crisis.” Such sentiments confirmed his earlier prediction that to survive, “big grant-size money is needed, and N.C.I. is going to keep ‘Tomming’ (their word) OEO and others to get it.”<sup>37</sup>

By 1972, NCI’s problems had compounded, and the project faced potential financial collapse. Hampered by limited funds, NCI had fallen into \$200,000 of debt and was on the verge of losing more than \$1 million worth of farmland. “It’s as simple as this,” Sherrod said, “If we don’t get long-range financing, we’ll lose 5,785 acres of land—

---

<sup>37</sup> Golden, *Watermelon Summer*, 121–133, 52; Postell, “New Lease on Life”, p. A19; Postell, “Tough Going for a Black Dream,” pp. 53-54.

the largest single piece of land owned by a black group in the nation.” Sherrod continued his mission to acquire public funding for the co-op, turning to the Lee County Community Action Panel only to find bureaucrats who harbored the same suspicions that had dogged NCI for years. “It is apparent,” said board member Louise Forrester, “that political control over the county, including zoning-taxing authority, bond issues, election of state and local officials, etc., would soon rest with the settlers of this new community.” Sherrod denied the claims, but Forrester was unconvinced, casually remarking after the meeting, “Evabody knows what that nigra is up to.” After three years, NCI leaders expected to have 100 families living in new homes, farming cooperatively and working in new food processing plants, while their children attended an on-site nursery school. NCI’s lofty goals were nowhere close to being realized. By 1972, just ten families lived on the land in old houses, farming 1,000 acres.<sup>38</sup>

Nevertheless, by early 1973, NCI leaders finally had some cause for celebration. The farm had grossed nearly \$500,000, and reports suggested that net profits for the year were close to \$150,000. Before 1973, yearly crop yields had been about half of Lee County averages. In 1973, however, NCI output exceeded both county and state averages per acre, and record high soybean prices finally put the organization in the black. NCI shipped fifteen tons of corn per day to Tuskegee Institute in Alabama for hog feed. Its farmers were also in the process of breeding hogs to sell at the market within five months, making 1973 NCI’s most successful year. Throughout the rest of the decade, however, persistent drought, poor crop yields, and internal dissension crippled the project. NCI leaders tried to find new ways to keep the farm alive, even considering

---

<sup>38</sup> “Poverty Project For Georgia Blacks in Danger of Collapse,” p. 5; Postell, “Tough Going for a Black Dream,” pp. 56-58 (quotations on 56, 58).

bringing in outside advisors to help increase profits. Sherrod had no illusions about NCI's financial woes. "We knew that the farm alone could not deal with that heavy a mortgage," he said, "we were only farming a third of it [the farmland]. The numbers didn't add up." No more than a dozen families ever lived full-time on the NCI farm. Therefore, NCI leaders had to depend on volunteer labor, and managers quickly learned how unreliable volunteers could be.<sup>39</sup>

NCI's optimism faded quickly with the coming year. In 1974, what had once been restrained grumblings from NCI's workforce exploded into the open, and the organization found itself on the wrong side of a public relations nightmare. Always plagued with a shortage of laborers and money to pay them, NCI leaders worked diligently to convince youths toiling in the fields that their inadequate pay was a worthy sacrifice needed to make the dream of black economic power a reality. Charles Sherrod served as head reverend of the gospel of NCI, and would break into impromptu sermons on the grand promise and egalitarian ethos of the project. Some found him to be a powerful orator and embraced his vision wholeheartedly, but others interpreted his shoot-from-the-hip style as the embodiment of the disorganization and inconsistency that hobbled NCI's growth. According to one reporter, "the word is that if you threw the Rev. Charles Sherrod in the Flint River, he'd float upstream. Some say he's that contradictory."<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> "Southwest Georgia Farmers Benefit From Cooperative Farm," *Afro American*, November 24, 1973, p. 5; Postell, "New Communities' Farm Gets New Lease on Life," p. 19; Allen G. Breed, "Black Farmers' Lawsuit Revives a Dream; Defunct Georgia Collective Seeks Redress After USDA Acknowledges Years of Bias," *Washington (D.C.) Washington Post*, December 6, 2001, p. A55.

<sup>40</sup> Postell, "Tough Going for a Black Dream," p. 52.

NCI's labor problems could be traced back to the winter of 1972-1973, when the group decided that the farm should support itself rather than rely on outside donations to stay afloat. As a result, the "community" began to look more like a profit-driven business—a leadership class formed, with newly-hired manager Harrison Miller at its head, tillable acreage was expanded, machinery was purchased outright or on credit, and as more people arrived to work on the farm, a stringent bookkeeping system was created. With these changes set in motion, the possibility of operating a democratic community and a commercial enterprise side-by-side became increasingly difficult. A renewed sense of discipline increased the farm's productivity, but also deepened the rift between field workers and administrators. In July 1973, NCI experienced its first rebellion. During the previous few summers, NCI had employed local black children and teenagers to work a 15-acre patch of land devoted to okra, peas, butter beans, and other fruits and vegetables. NCI leaders portrayed its "Make Work" program as a charitable response to the army of youngsters beating down their door for work. "We did not expect all the children to work an eight or nine hour day," read one NCI newsletter, "...most would work at a child's pace and rest regularly in the shade...we therefore paid them as children in accord with their performance." The program seemed logical, even promising to NCI managers; through their work, the kids would come to embrace the project's goals, maybe even stay on the farm instead of moving to the city, and help break the cycle of rural poverty in southwest Georgia. But when a large group of underprivileged black youths spent a few weeks picking okra in the Georgia heat, lofty notions of selflessness and community took a back seat to their desire to get paid. The fifteen to twenty-five teenagers on the farm made one dollar for each hamper of okra they picked. In the early summer of 1973, okra

sold for an average of six dollars a hamper at the farmer's market in Columbus. When the price dropped to five-dollars a hamper, however, an NCI manager immediately cut the teenagers' share to seventy-five cents a hamper. Incensed, the kids plopped down under the shade of a tree and refused to work. The next day, the youngsters begrudgingly returned to the fields, and a day later manager Harrison Miller restored their pay to its previous levels. The strike, albeit brief and spontaneous, poked a hole in the democratic fabric of the organization, and set the stage for the calamitous summer of 1974.<sup>41</sup> You should note that by this time there was a national minimum wage for farmworkers, albeit a lower one than the one everyone else got. Not a big deal now, though.

Throughout the next year, labor relations on the farm worsened. No comprehensive labor policy existed, and the young workers felt as though management arrived at muddled, contradictory decisions with no input from the rank-and-file. A manager would show up and issue a new policy, only for the new rule to be overturned quickly thereafter by another manager, with little explanation for the change. When workers showed up to the farm in the summer of 1974, a more rigid labor policy had taken effect. The most pronounced change was the introduction of the time clock. Workers now punched in and out, and began to expect a regular, set number of hours to work every day. They now had Saturdays off, and a de facto "quitting time" dictated the end of their shifts. Such a system undercut the "by any means necessary" mantra that had previously defined NCI's survivalist mission. As a result, problems arose when unforeseen circumstances required workers to go above and beyond their regimented

---

<sup>41</sup> Robert Maurer, "In Southwest Georgia: Experiment in New Communities," Durham (Nc.) *Southern Exposure* (Fall 1974) pp. 67–68; "Keepin' On," p. 2.

schedules.<sup>42</sup> Sudden thunderstorms delayed harvesting, or a surprise wholesale order for 500 bags of Irish potatoes due the next morning put managers in the awkward position of begging workers to stay until the order was filled. At first, the workers pulled late night shifts to fill each order, but after several nights, most began to drift away at quitting time. Exhausted from a long day's work in the summer sun, workers ignored pleas for extended service, leaving orders to be delayed, crops to wilt in the field, and bags to rot in the shed.<sup>43</sup>

The time clock also compelled NCI workers to shift payment expectations from a “piece rate” system—where workers’ earnings depended on how many buckets or bags they picked—to a standard hourly wage. Whether they could not afford to or they chose not to, NCI leaders paid most workers far below minimum wage—a decision they would come to regret very soon. NCI wages varied widely in 1974—full-time tractor drivers made \$1.60 per hour, the national minimum wage for farmworkers (the minimum wage for other workers was \$1.90), but seasonal summer employees received either \$8 a day (adults) or \$5 a day (children). The nature of NCI’s wage system remained mostly hidden from public view, until a young political organizer going under the assumed name of “Robert Johnson” (real name—Ron Wilkins) hired on at NCI in the summer of 1974. Wilkins immediately seized on the low wages of the “Make Work” program as a rallying point for the young workers, and attempted to bring NCI administrators to the negotiating table. In an attempt to stifle the threat, NCI leaders quickly fired Wilkins, who then reached out to anyone who would listen to publicize the story. By mid-July, with

---

<sup>42</sup> A normal practice for farm hands, who weren’t eligible for overtime pay (though the kids probably didn’t know that).

<sup>43</sup> Maurer, “Experiment in New Communities,” pp. 68–69.

Wilkins's help, a group of workers addressed a rambling 20-page complaint to NCI's 27-member board of directors. The complaint charged Sherrod and other NCI managers with "alleged misuse of farm equipment, unsuccessful marketing techniques, abuse of personnel, arrogance and opportunism." The group filled the complaint with dozens of stories detailing various instances of malpractice, like the time tractor drivers accidentally mowed down a \$600 acre vineyard, or the day they cut down a strawberry field instead of the surrounding weeds.<sup>44</sup>

Sherrod shrugged off the complaints, musing aloud that, "anybody can make a mistake." But while Sherrod displayed an aura of peaceful unflappability, NCI waged a painful internal war behind closed doors. The extent of that pain was brought out during an arduous nine-hour meeting on July 20, where NCI board members tried to find a way to keep the brewing conflict within their "extended family." During the meeting in the farm's day care center, NCI members wrestled with tough questions: were they now experiencing the post-sixties disillusion felt by many former activists? Had they betrayed their original democratic principles? Or, as one board member wondered, had they simply changed the face rather than the system of power? Several board members considered resigning, like Joe Brooks, executive director of the Emergency Land Fund, who called the farm a "boss-run factory." Or James Pierce, executive director of the Rural

---

<sup>44</sup> Letter from Mack Lyons to Cesar Chavez, September 24, 1974, Information and Research Department, Part 1, Box 28, Folder 22, UFWP; "Keepin' On," p. 2; Postell, "Tough Going for a Black Dream," p. 58; Maurer, "Experiment in New Communities," p. 69.



Advancement Fund, who declared, “I want no part of any organization that substitutes black plantation owners for white plantation owners.”<sup>45</sup>

Several weeks after the July meeting, a balanced investigatory committee of board members largely sustained the workers’ claims, including charges of substandard wages, prolonged hours, violations of health and safety standards, favoritism for certain members, poor management, and the absence of a proper grievance procedure. Despite these findings, management moved slowly, and had only made substantive progress toward settling one dispute by August. On August 19, fed up with the pace of change, fifty black workers walked off the farm. Realizing their need for outside help to sustain the strike, Wilkins called veteran United Farm Workers (UFW) organizer Mack Lyons in Florida on August 20, asking for assistance. Lyons circulated their story through the UFW, eventually speaking with Cesar Chavez, who suggested he visit the strike site. Lyons met with around twenty strikers, most under the age of 16, to discuss unionization. The black teenagers all signed with the UFW, and eventually, forty-seven workers would join them in the strike. The next day, Lyons appeared before NCI’s board of directors, who took a defensive position and gave no answer when asked how they planned to address the breakdown. Wilkins and the striking workers responded by traveling north to picket the Atlanta office of Harry Bowie, associate director of the Southern Regional Council and NCI board chairman. When originally confronted about their wage scales in early summer, NCI leaders insisted that their pay matched and even exceeded other farms

---

<sup>45</sup> Postell, “Tough Going for a Black Dream,” p. 58; Maurer, “Experiment in New Communities,” p. 69.

in the area.<sup>46</sup> But with the damaging exposure from the fallout and the looming threat of exorbitant fines from the Georgia Department of Labor, NCI agreed to pay back wages in accordance with the law, cease discriminatory pay differentials, develop a personnel manual, reimburse travel for farm business, and “study and use the Occupational Health and Safety Act” to make sure no workers would be subjected to harmful chemicals again. NCI downplayed the strike as a three-week anomaly, noting that the board had worked quickly to resolve the issues at hand, and now hoped to put the unfortunate incident in the rear view mirror.<sup>47</sup>

To the great relief of the NCI leadership, the farm gradually returned to working order. The troublesome youngsters returned to school in September, and the strike dwindled to three workers. Some NCI leaders viewed the crisis as an important moment of reckoning for the organization. Board chairman Harry Bowie remarked, “an old dream is bound to become a nightmare if it is not continually tested by reality.” “This has been traumatic for all of us,” Sherrod admitted, “but it has brought us closer together.” Despite Sherrod’s positive affirmations that the fight had strengthened the organization, many NCI members could not shake an unavoidable sense of pessimism about the project’s future. Annie Hawkins, a 50-year old NCI veteran, mourned the Sherrod of years past who had convinced her to move onto Featherfield Farm. “I believed him,” she said; “I remember when Sherrod first came here. He was beautiful.” Robert Maurer, a white college student and former “Georgia Brigade” member, described the toll that years of

---

<sup>46</sup> It probably did, given how few employers complied with the law. But most farmers had not promised a democratic community that aimed to end rural poverty.

<sup>47</sup> Maurer, “Experiment in New Communities,” p. 69; Mack Lyons to Cesar Chavez, September 24, 1974, UFWP; Postell, “Tough Going for a Black Dream,” p. 58; “Keepin’ On,” p. 2; Charles Postell, “Union to Enter NCI Fuss,” Albany (Ga.) *The Albany Herald*, September 28, 1974, pp. 1, A23.

struggle had taken on Sherrod: “He’s no longer the tireless hustler for outside funds; he’s no longer NCI’s board chairman; and he’s no longer organizing in southwest Georgia...Most of his time is now spent on the farm itself, filling in the gaps where work is most urgently needed...Overall, however, he seems aimless, or rather like a person whose former path has been effaced by the passage of time, and he doesn’t know which way to go next.”<sup>48</sup>

Sherrod shrugged off any notion that something was wrong. “We’re gonna have problems, man,” he said, “but it’s gonna be all right...it’s all connected with God.” NCI’s fortunes only worsened over the next decade. The group simply could not sell enough produce to meet the interest payments on their gargantuan outstanding loans. With each year came another underperforming harvest, and NCI’s financial commitments expanded. At the point of near-collapse in early 1974, NCI had been saved by contributions from several well-heeled northern churches. But as 1980 approached, the stream of philanthropic donations steadily dried up, and NCI went back to USDA for help. NCI soon discovered that not much had changed at the agency. Each loan application was met with a boilerplate letter of denial and at times outright hostility. When visiting the local FmHA office to inquire about a recent application, one administrator told Sherrod that he would get a loan “over my dead body.” With the gap between their revenues and loan payments growing larger, Sherrod tried to work the charity circuit once more, calling on individuals and foundations for donations to help save the farm, telling everyone that a mere \$250 would make one-acre on the farm “mortgage-free.” When the fundraising campaign began losing steam, NCI was forced to sell some of its land at rock-bottom

---

<sup>48</sup> Maurer, “In Southwest Georgia: Experiment in New Communities,” p. 71; Postell, “Tough Going for a Black Dream,” p. 58.

prices to cover its debts. By the end of the decade, the farm had shrunk by more than 1,300 acres.<sup>49</sup>

FmHA refused to provide any loans to NCI until 1979, when federal officials forced local administrators to approve their application but that year marked the beginning of a severe five-year drought. During the early 1980s, federal loans rarely came in, and when they did, they were always too little, too late. “You start late, you harvest late and, of course, you’re the last ones to sell,” said NCI treasurer Robert Christian, “and the buyers that needed peanuts, they’ve already got their bins full.” Unlike their responses to white farmers, federal administrators denied NCI’s request for an emergency loan to construct a small irrigation system without providing any explanation. In 1982, NCI began selling timber to keep the farm afloat, only to have USDA confiscate the profits as collateral for another loan. By 1983, NCI owed over \$500,000 in delinquent loans to FmHA. In late April 1983, FmHA threatened to foreclose on the land. NCI leaders hoped to receive another operating loan from FmHA, but it never came. Board members decided to sell off another 1,400 acres to raise money and allow the organization to use the immediate income as operating capital instead of collateral.<sup>50</sup>

As its sources of income dwindled, NCI’s failure became a fait accompli. By 1985, NCI’s financiers began foreclosing on the remaining land. NCI declared Chapter

---

<sup>49</sup> “Members of Ga. Project Pledge to Stand Firm,” St. Thomas (V.I.) *Virgin Islands Daily News*, May 25, 1976, p. 14; Smith, “Social Experiment Remains Alive,” p. 10; Breed, “Black Farmers’ Lawsuit Revives a Dream,” p. 55.

<sup>50</sup> “New Communities Given Loan Reprieve by FmHA,” Albany (Ga.) *Albany Herald*, April 21, 1983, p. B1; Breed, “Black Farmers’ Lawsuit Revives a Dream” p. 55; Diana Smith, “Social Experiment Still Alive on Sherrod’s Land,” Lewiston (Me.) *Lewiston Journal*, March 1, 1984, p. 14; Kathleen Hennessey, “In Shirley Sherrod’s Georgia, the Jim Crow Past Defines the Present,” *McClatchy-Tribune News Service*, August 5, 2010.

11 bankruptcy in January, and secured four months to reorganize and develop a payment plan with its creditors. “They were given extensions and they kept getting extensions,” a Prudential spokesman said, but by July of 1985 it became clear that NCI “just couldn’t make it,” and Prudential foreclosed on most of NCI’s land to satisfy a \$709,000 debt. Shortly thereafter, Prudential sold the majority of the land to FmHA in a foreclosure auction in July. The First State Bank of Albany still held the title to 900 acres of NCI farmland. Sherrod, not ready to give up, tried unsuccessfully to solicit \$30,000 in donations to recoup the land. The final nail in NCI’s coffin came in November 1985, when an Atlanta businessman purchased over 3,000 acres of the foreclosed land, planning to convert most of the farm to timberland.<sup>51</sup>

Although NCI collapsed in 1985, the fact that it persisted for seventeen years despite strident white opposition, government discrimination, insufficient funds, and chronic labor shortages remained an impressive achievement. For many of its members, NCI had been a source of pride. Robert Christian, the son and grandson of former sharecroppers, became the first member of his family to own land. “Well, to tell you the truth,” Christian said, “my chest was stuck out as far as it could be stuck out, just to be a part of the idea.” “We had some grand dreams,” Sherrod said, “but we have not given these dreams up.” NCI leaders had envisioned the project as “a new form of black power, a way to provide food for the hungry, a payroll for the jobless, and a base for minority economic development in Southwest Georgia.” The dream of black community land

---

<sup>51</sup> Associated Press, “Founders Hold Hope for Co-Op: Blacks Seeking to Revive Farm,” Palm Beach (Fl.) *Palm Beach Post*, October 31, 1985, p. B6; Associated Press, “Black Farming Venture Is Still A Dream Despite Foreclosure,” Waycross (Ga.) *Waycross Journal-Herald*, October 30, 1985, p. P2; David Pierce, “New Communities: Atlanta Businessman Purchases Lion’s Share of Sherrod’s ‘Dream City,’” Albany (Ga.) *Albany Herald*, November 3, 1985, p. D1.

ownership lived on past foreclosure. Sherrod and others involved in the project took their fight to the courts, beginning a protracted legal battle.<sup>52</sup>

In August 1997, Timothy Pigford, a black farmer from North Carolina, sued the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Pigford claimed racial discrimination, arguing that complaints from black farmers had been ignored since the Reagan Administration dismantled the Office of Civil Rights in 1983. A USDA study supported Pigford's allegations that the federal government took three times longer to process loan applications for black farmers than it did for white farmers. Hundreds of black farmers, including Charles and Shirley Sherrod, signed on to the class-action lawsuit. Within a year, a judge approved a \$2 billion settlement that would allow each farmer to seek up to \$50,000 in cash and debt forgiveness, or pursue more through arbitration. In 2009, chief arbitrator Michael Lewis ruled that the USDA had discriminated against NCI by denying its loan applications. Lewis awarded \$12.8 million to NCI and \$150,000 each to Charles and Shirley Sherrod for "mental anguish."<sup>53</sup>

In the summer of 2011, the Sherrods spent \$5 million of the NCI settlement to purchase Cypress Pond Plantation in the southwest corner of Dougherty County. Stretching nearly 1,700 acres, the land once served as the home for the Tarver family and its cotton empire. The original builder, General Hartwell Tarver, owned more than a thousand slaves strewn across several plantations in Georgia. The Sherrods renamed the plantation "Resora," and transformed the property into a community center, museum, nature preserve, resort, and a collective farming operation. "There have been critics, of

---

<sup>52</sup> Breed, "Black Farmers' Lawsuit Revives a Dream," p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> Cowan and Jody, "The Pigford Case"; Hennessey, "In Shirley Sherrod's Georgia"; Daniel, *Dispossession*, 263–264.

course,” Shirley Sherrod remarked, “people saying ‘Charles and Shirley Sherrod went out and bought themselves a plantation.’ It’s not like that. It was never like that. From the beginning, this whole concept has been about community. That’s the way it was in the beginning; that’s the way it is now.”<sup>54</sup>

Ultimately, the story of New Communities, Inc. does not fit into a tidy narrative of progress. In 1968, NCI joined a wave of black agricultural co-operatives sprouting up across the South. Led by veterans of local civil rights movements, these organizations fought to carve out a space away from the city where they could pool their resources to halt the rapid loss of black-owned farmland and help pave a road towards economic autonomy. These projects signaled a changing of priorities, as activists devoted more energy to constructing independent black economic institutions than registering voters or integrating schools. As SNCC collapsed, Martin Luther King, Jr. died, and SCLC and CORE fizzled out in the late 1960s, local activists like the Sherrods chose to create new organizations to continue the march towards racial equality. To accomplish their goals, co-op leaders threw themselves into a pitched battle that engaged federal bureaucrats, state officials, and local residents, all of whom fought to use the programs of the War on Poverty to reshape the southern landscape.

In several ways, NCI’s story serves as a window into how the “long civil rights movement” collided with the rise of the New Right and the erosion of the Great Society. Throughout its existence, NCI fell victim to bad timing, and was constantly haunted by questions of “what if?” What if they had formed a few years earlier when a more sympathetic Sargent Shriver might have overridden the veto of their grant money? What

---

<sup>54</sup> Carlton Fletcher, “Resora Community Will Make Public, Private Debuts Saturday,” Albany (Ga.) *Albany Herald*, June 7, 2014.

if Chester Carlson had survived long enough to provide reliable funding during those crucial early years? What if Slater King had lived to help them avoid the organizational and financial nightmares that sprouted like weeds after his death? Like the earlier short-term failure of the Albany Movement protests, disheartened activists and outside observers searched for a primary cause of death.

Attempting to diagnose the ailments that plague local movements, however, often turns into a game of “whack-a-mole.” To be sure, NCI suffered from bouts of poor leadership, mismanagement, and unrealistic expectations. Like many alternative communities, NCI struggled to balance its utopian mission with the demanding prerequisites for success in a capitalist framework. But for NCI, as well as other black co-ops, the only realistic chance of long-term success hinged on the willingness of the federal government to provide large sums of money and assistance over the objections of local white power brokers. In 1970, Donald Rumsfeld proved unwilling to take the same leap of faith with NCI that Sargent Shriver had taken three years earlier with SWAFCA, and consigned the organization to an unsustainable decade-and-a-half search for private funding. Like many other activists attempting to marshal the resources of the federal government in the post-LBJ era, Charles Sherrod and the black farmers of southwest Georgia found their old enemies had not disappeared, but simply changed their tactics.



## CHAPTER SIX

### “UNTIL HELL FREEZES OVER”: JOHNSON V. CITY OF ALBANY AND THE FIGHT FOR EQUAL EMPLOYMENT

Yaz Johnson drove a familiar route every day in 2012, from his photography studio on Gordon Avenue to his church, passing the brick buildings that housed Albany, Georgia’s city services. Driving by the local business center, named for longtime City Commissioner Arthur Williams, Johnson lamented that “the city will do nothing to recognize my father.” “I’m not going to downplay the significance Arthur Williams might have had,” Johnson said, “but if it hadn’t been for my dad, he wouldn’t even have had that opportunity.” For the past decade since the death of his father, Johnnie Johnson, Yaz had been petitioning Albany’s leaders to name a building for the man who “sacrificed his job and his health” to challenge workplace discrimination in southwest Georgia.<sup>1</sup>

The struggle to etch Johnson’s legacy into the physical structure of the city resurrected a historic rift between Albany’s black and white communities. The chasm between what whites thought blacks wanted and what they actually desired had been exposed in vivid detail to the entire nation through the “Albany Movement” of 1961-1962, when African-American leaders began a direct-action push to desegregate the entire city. The struggle reached a national audience after the arrival of Martin Luther

---

<sup>1</sup> Carlton Fletcher, “For More than a Decade, an Albany Pastor Has Waged a Battle to Have the City Honor His Father for His Fight against Discrimination,” *Albany Herald*, March 23, 2012.

King, Jr. in December 1961. King's involvement threw the Albany Movement into high gear and destabilized the somewhat fragile alliance between older middle-class professionals and younger, more aggressive leaders. The shaky coalition struggled to present a united front in the face of shrewd opposition from local police. Mass protests did not bring forth dogs, blackjacks, and fire hoses, only mass arrests, conducted (for the most part) peacefully by officers under strict orders from Chief Laurie Pritchett not to harm anyone.

The fleeting spotlight on Albany faded after King's retreat to Atlanta in July 1962, and elicited much hand wringing and armchair quarterbacking to determine what had gone wrong. Early accounts of the Albany Movement featured a stock conclusion: King and local movement leaders had demanded too much, planned too little, and underestimated the ability of whites to wage a war of attrition. After the dust had settled, the direct-action phase of the movement continued for another year, led by a dwindling but zealous group of young Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) activists. The "Snicks" made incremental strides, though most of their efforts accomplished little outside of the psychological realm. Token desegregation came surprisingly fast through court orders and pre-emptive city ordinances. By the end of the 1960s, in theory, Albany's black residents could attend any school, vote in any election, and apply for any job.

That theory, however, would be put to the test in the fall of 1971, when Johnnie Johnson, a black carpenter, stormed out of the City of Albany Public Works office, sparking a prolonged strike that lifted the veil of civility between the races and exposed the hollow nature of black progress in southwest Georgia. Though the strike itself

eventually ran out of steam, Johnson and his co-workers brought a lawsuit, *Johnson v. City of Albany* (1976), that produced an affirmative action order requiring the city to hire a greater proportion of black workers. Whites begrudgingly accepted the new state of affairs, but over the course of its life (1976-1995), the hiring order became a lightning rod for criticism from both the white and black communities. Unsuccessful white applicants charged reverse racism. Black leaders accused white bosses of subverting the spirit of the order by funneling new black hires into entry-level jobs. By the early 1990s, Albany's white city commissioners convinced Federal Judge Wilbur Owens that the hiring order he had handed down in 1976 was no longer needed in southwest Georgia.

The loss was met with a collective sigh from Albany's black leaders, who expressed the frustrations of a community running up against a growing repudiation of court-enforced affirmative action—the one mechanism that had proven effective in opening the workplace to black advancement. Beneath the heated rhetoric that accompanied its rise and fall, the Johnson saga brought to light the more casual and understood racism of the post-civil rights workplace for black men and women.

While historians have adequately explored the overlapping struggles for labor and civil rights during the 1970s, less attention has been paid to the more obscure legal battles brought forth by aggrieved black workers in the medium-sized cities of the South, those along the urban-rural divide of the Black Belt, far from the metropolitan centers of America where “big tent” Democratic politics provided a seat at the table for minorities and organized labor. It was in the large cities of post-civil rights America—far from Albany—where a window of opportunity opened for working-class blacks to use strikes as a battering ram to clear paths of advancement in public sector employment.

Historian Joseph McCartin has placed this window of municipal labor activism in the early 1970s by contrasting early wins for public sector unions with a pronounced crackdown by the end of the decade. A successful 1970 “sickout” by the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) kicked off a seven-year period during which mayors and city commissioners shied away from battles with union leaders. When they did issue threats to fire striking workers—like the one Atlanta Mayor Sam Massell sent to the city’s sanitation employees in April 1970—widespread criticism rained down from civic groups and churches that pushed mayors back to the negotiating table. By 1977, however, something had changed. No longer did politicians feel pressured to kowtow to their rebellious employees. In the intervening years, stagflation, oil shocks, and dwindling paychecks diminished the public’s sympathy for sanitation strikes that left garbage bags piling up in the street while ungrateful municipal workers held the city hostage for money that would push budgets even further into the red.<sup>2</sup>

Maynard Jackson personified the new complexity of Democratic politics in the South. In 1970, while serving as Atlanta’s first black Vice-Mayor, Jackson had convinced his boss not to fire 1,400 striking sanitation workers. But when confronted with his own labor impasse seven years later, Jackson—now Mayor of Atlanta—waited one day before instructing his subordinates to follow the advice of his friend Martin Luther King, Sr.,

---

<sup>2</sup> Joseph A. McCartin, “‘Fire the Hell out of Them’: Sanitation Workers’ Struggles and the Normalization of the Striker Replacement Strategy in the 1970s,” *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 67–92; Perhaps the historian who has chronicled the use of the striker replacement tactic most is Timothy J. Minchin. See his articles “Torn Apart: Permanent Replacements and the Crossett Strike of 1985,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2000): 30–58; “Broken Spirits: Permanent Replacements and the Rumford Strike of 1986,” *The New England Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 5–31; “‘It Tears the Heart Right out of You’: Memories of Striker Replacement at International Paper Company in De Pere, Wisconsin, 1987-88,” *The Oral History Review* 31, no. 2 (2004): 1–27.

and “fire the hell out of them.” In short, the “striker replacement tactic” had slowly normalized with each passing year, and by 1977, public employees had lost in the court of public opinion. Any hope that their fortunes would improve was dashed in 1981, when President Ronald Reagan brought the hammer down, dismissing over 11,000 air traffic controllers to squelch a PATCO strike. Reagan’s iron-fisted response marked a watershed in American labor history. During the 1970s the United States averaged 289 strikes a year; after the PATCO debacle that figure dropped by 78 percent to an average of 62 strikes per year; by the 1990s that average fell to 35.<sup>3</sup>

McCartin is right—in America’s major urban centers, the early 1970s provided fertile ground for successful public employee strikes. When one looks at Albany, Georgia’s labor history, however, it becomes clear that local politics in the southern Black Belt vibrated on a different frequency. The political arithmetic that compelled Maynard Jackson to lobby against the firing of 1,400 sanitation workers in 1970 simply did not apply to Albany’s power brokers. Mayor Motie Wiggins didn’t consult any polling data before firing hundreds of striking garbage men; he didn’t need to—there was no question of where the city’s powerful white electorate stood on the matter. In 1972, Albany had no black city officials, no real union presence, and the idea of giving collective bargaining rights to hundreds of black workers filled white voters and politicians with unspeakable anxiety. In other words, while it may have taken Atlanta seven years to complete its about-face on the striker replacement strategy, in Albany the tactic sprouted naturally from southwest Georgia’s legacy of white supremacy.

---

<sup>3</sup> “Fire the Hell out of Them,” 67-92.

Johnnie Johnson's 1972 walkout was the long-brewing response to a decade of passive resistance by Albany's white residents. In Albany, the 1970s dawned on a black community that had seen little to no improvement in living conditions or job opportunities. That inequality manifested itself down to the layout of the city streets, which remained mostly unpaved in black neighborhoods. "Danger" signs marked those houses that had been condemned but remained occupied by poor families. The notices shielded observers from hundreds of other dwellings that should have been condemned but were preserved by white slumlords who charged black families twenty-five dollars a week. The lines that divided white from black neighborhoods also divided those with city services from those without. Gas, sewage, and even garbage collection remained unavailable to many black homes. City zoning ordinances changed fluidly in black neighborhoods, usually to accommodate new businesses. The Sunrise neighborhood of Albany, one of the few subdivisions open to affluent blacks, became home to a new slaughterhouse, which spread a cloud of unpleasant fumes over each house and drove down property values. The dire economic conditions bred resignation from many in the poorest wards. "They've battered their heads so long," one observer noted, "they just don't give a damn anymore."<sup>4</sup>

Yet for many black families, government remained the primary source of economic sustenance in southwest Georgia. Black servicemen worked at Turner Air Force Base and the nearby Marine Corps Logistics Base. Black letter carriers, though few in number, held a prized position of autonomy provided by the federal bureaucracy. Further down the economic ladder stood the largest share of black workers—those who

---

<sup>4</sup> Duart Farquharson, "Blacks' Future Bleak in South Georgia Where Even Late Martin Luther King Failed," *The Montreal Gazette*, October 31, 1972.

toiled in the entry-level ranks of city services, men like Johnnie Johnson, who worked for the city, spent their days laying gas pipelines, digging ditches, and heaving garbage bags into the back of trucks. Johnson, and those like him, worked outdoors, through the pouring rain, amid the bitter cold of winter, and under the boiling Georgia sun. “At that time,” according to Johnson’s attorney Herbert Phipps, “they didn’t even allow blacks to drive the truck...you had a white driver who’s sitting there in the warm truck, and the blacks hanging off the back picking up the garbage.”<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, Albany’s black municipal employees worked as cheap laborers and nothing more. They made less money than their white counterparts. They punched the clock every morning at segregated office buildings. All employee facilities—restrooms, rest areas, drinking fountains, and coffee pots—were divided by race. Even social functions like the office Christmas party remained segregated. A white city manager, chosen by an all-white slate of city commissioners, held the power to hire and fire city employees and set their wages. City commissioners appointed policemen and firemen, though “with suggestions by the police and fire chief permitted.” In practice, broad powers were delegated to the department heads, who funneled black and white employees into separate and unequal economic worlds.<sup>6</sup>

The ringleaders of the strike came from similar backgrounds. They were all black men who had come of age in the South. They had little in the way of formal education,

---

<sup>5</sup> Lee W. Formwalt, “*A Garden of Irony and Diversity*,” in *The New Georgia Guide* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996); Herbert Phipps, interview with author, January 7, 2011, Albany, GA.

<sup>6</sup> *Johnson v. City of Albany, Ga.*, 413 F. Supp. 782 (U.S. Middle District of Georgia, Albany Division, 1976) Summary opinion can be found at <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/413/782/1660968/>, the full case file is housed at the C.B. King Federal Courthouse Clerk's Office, Albany, GA.

many having dropped out during grade school. They had worked for the city in various capacities since the 1950s, and had earned the trust and admiration of their peers. Johnnie Johnson, the understood leader of the group, was “one of the ringtails,” as he put it, who “wasn’t afraid to go up there and ask for what I wanted.” Johnson began working at age fourteen when he found his “pure profession” as a barber—a trade he would use to supplement his income throughout the rest of his life. He worked as an orderly at the Sumter County Hospital throughout high school, and spent his afternoons and weekends helping local carpenters. In 1958, at age eighteen, he went to work for the city as a janitor. Six months later he was promoted to the maintenance department, where he worked as a carpenter. He mostly repaired windows, but as the years passed he took on greater responsibilities. When the city needed a new carpentry shop built, they turned to Johnson, who spearheaded the project with minimal assistance.<sup>7</sup>

Johnson had a natural charm that allowed him to connect with his co-workers. “He had a very witty sense of humor,” his son Yaz remembered, “but at the same time, he said what he means, and he means what he says.” According to Yaz, those who met Johnnie Johnson all came away with the same impression: “that he wasn’t scared of nothin’.” By the time of the strike in 1972, at thirty-two years of age, Johnson had already married his high school sweetheart Thelma, become a father, bought a home, and logged fourteen years as a respected employee in the Public Works Department of the City of Albany, Georgia.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Deposition of Johnny Johnson, Lewis Court Reporters (U.S. Middle District Court of Georgia, Albany Division, 1974) 3-16; Yaz Johnson, interview with author, Albany, GA, April 26, 2017, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia.

<sup>8</sup> Yaz Johnson, interview with author, Albany, GA, April 26, 2017, Description of Johnson is taken from scans of photographs in Yaz Johnson's possession.



Throughout those fourteen years, though, Johnson and his black colleagues absorbed a steady dose of blatant mistreatment at the hands of their white superiors. There were the signs over the water fountains that dispensed cool, clear water that read, “no negroes allowed to drink out of the fountain”, and “blacks keep away.” There were the aging fountains that spit out lukewarm water for black workers. To get reliably cold water, black workers filled a five-gallon jug with ice and stacked it on top of their sputtering fountain. There was the shabby hovel black workers were forced to wait in during inclement weather—a sparse, poorly heated room with two old church benches and a few other items built with materials fished from the scrap heap. There were supervisors like L.E. Rogers at the disposal plant, men who were “bad with that language,” who would “get on that radio and say ‘nigger this’ and ‘nigger that.’”<sup>9</sup>

And yet, despite the accumulation of real and perceived slights over the years, when asked why they struck, every black worker went back to two fundamental grievances—racial discrimination and a lack of opportunity. “We got tired of hiring and practicing racial discrimination. That’s what we got tired of,” Johnnie Johnson responded. “It just boiled down to that we didn’t mean enough,” said Willy Foggy, “...they didn’t have to see us because our work didn’t mean enough to them.” “I wanted better conditions for myself and my family,” said Lindberg Roberts. “I thought we’d get better service, equal pay,” said Ernest Culbreath.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Johnson Deposition, 21–24.

<sup>10</sup> Johnson Deposition, 30; Deposition of Willy Foggy, Lewis Court Reporters (U.S. Middle District of Georgia, Albany Division, 1974), 25; Deposition of Lindberg Roberts, Lewis Court Reporters (U.S. Middle District Court of Georgia, Albany Division, 1974), 21; Deposition of Ernest Culbreath, Lewis Court Reporters (U.S. Middle District Court of Georgia, Albany Division, 1974), 12.

The frustration of black workers that previously hid behind swallowed pride burst into the open on the morning of Wednesday, April 19, 1972, when Johnnie Johnson got into an argument with his boss, the City Building Inspector, Mr. Gilbert. Tensions had been building since the previous fall, when Johnson and his friend Julian Mayo, a water department employee, had solicited the help of two union organizers from the Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA), E.G. Bartlett and Alfred Hazel. Initially, Bartlett and Hazel arrived to speak to as many city workers as would listen about the benefits of unionization. After hearing their grievances and realizing that segregation, both economic and personal, still dictated life in Albany, the two decided to extend their stay. They began meeting at least once a week with city employees, to convince workers to join LIUNA before moving forward with any demands.<sup>11</sup>

By the spring of 1972, Hazel and Bartlett finally secured a meeting with Mayor Motie Wiggins, a close friend and law partner of former Mayor Asa Kelley, who had firmly dug in his heels to forestall integration during the Albany Movement a decade before. Union leaders cataloged the discriminatory working conditions in city services and asked for a pathway to recognition for LIUNA, either by election or card check. According to sworn testimony from E.G. Bartlett, the mayor “questioned whether we represented them or not and I showed him a stack of possibly two hundred and some odd authorization membership cards.” A few days later, on April 5, 1972, the powers that be—Mayor Wiggins, Albany’s five city commissioners, and city manager Stephen Roos—met with Bartlett, Hazel, and several employee representatives. For thirty minutes, Bartlett pressed for a bargaining agreement between members of the newly formed Local 1309

---

<sup>11</sup> *Johnson v. City of Albany, Ga.*, 413 F. Supp.

and city management. In exchange for a no-strike pledge and compulsory arbitration, Bartlett promised to bring the blue-collar workers to the negotiating table. Bartlett and Mayor Wiggins went back and forth, disputing the grounds for Bartlett to be present at all. Bartlett insisted that the city could legally recognize and bargain with a union; Wiggins said a labor lawyer told him it was not possible. Bartlett concluded with an exhortation: “if you work for a living, you need a union to represent you.” Wiggins said “the matter would be taken under advisement,” and the two parted ways.<sup>12</sup>

Thirteen days later, the City of Albany addressed a letter denying Local 1309’s bid for recognition and collective bargaining. Months of organizing compounded with years of discrimination to place black city employees on the razor’s edge of direct action. All attempts to extend an olive branch to city management had failed. The mainstream avenues of dissent had been exhausted, and most workers began to discuss contingency plans. In the wake of their meeting with the mayor, employees of Local 1309 voted 274-0 to strike if the city commission refused to recognize the union. So it came as no surprise that the incident that would spark the largest series of protests since the heyday of the Albany Movement took place within the next twenty-four hours. On Wednesday, April 19, 1972, Johnnie Johnson arrived at the sanitation department as he did every morning, to punch the clock before heading out on his route. It was there that he got into a dispute with his supervisor, who informed him that he would not be paid for the two days he spent in union meetings the previous week. In the heat of the ensuing argument, the supervisor told Johnson, “if you can’t do what I say on my job you hit the gate,” and fired him. Incensed, Johnson made the rounds, telling his black co-workers of his firing and

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

demanding they join him in a walkout. 260 black employees responded to his call, saying, “if you go, we go.”<sup>13</sup>

Word of the strike spread quickly outside the building. Many workers abandoned their garbage trucks and vehicles in the middle of the street. One employee drove in front of city hall where he calmly parked, got out, and unloaded the day’s trash haul. That night union members sat in the dark during a meeting because a transformer had been sabotaged. The next day, workers turned out to picket the public works, utilities, and city-county government buildings, vowing not to return until the city recognized their union.<sup>14</sup>

As quickly as employees went on strike, the city responded with a hard line: come back to work within twenty-four hours or lose your jobs. The ultimatum split the union in two—nearly half of those who walked off the job returned the next day. Roughly 150 remained to weather the storm of opposition from uncooperative city commissioners and disgruntled residents upset about their interrupted trash service, their unmaintained sewers and streets, and their neglected parks, cemeteries, and public utilities. One week into the strike, the city reaffirmed its position to 250 employees who jammed into the Dougherty County Superior Court, which had been converted into a meeting space for the overflow crowd. Union leader E.G. Bartlett alternated between offering the carrot and the stick. He tried to evoke sympathy, arguing that the real issue at hand was one of “human beings, bread and butter, and breakfast, lunch, and dinner.” “Albany’s main problem,” he claimed, “was a hungry and forgotten people.” When that approach failed, Bartlett threatened to push their case into the state and federal levels. Unfazed by the speakers, or

---

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Associated Press, “Workers Vow No Return Until City Recognizes Union,” *Waycross Journal-Herald*, April 20, 1972, sec. P; Herbert Phipps, interview with author.

the outbursts of applause and cheers from black workers that punctuated their appeals, the entire city commission agreed—there would be no concessions, and come Monday morning they would begin filling those empty positions. Exasperated, fellow union leader Alfred Hazel responded with a promise: “We will not go away and will be here until Hell freezes over.”<sup>15</sup>

Union leaders prepared more aggressive measures. On May 17, 1972, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) responded to the union’s complaint, and instructed the city to preserve its payroll and personnel records. As the EEOC letter arrived at city hall, two men were being held in jail for firing shotguns into the homes of utility workers who refused to strike or had been hired as replacements. Workers began canvassing local black businesses, asking owners to display placards of support in their windows. Businesses that refused would be boycotted. They reached out to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), who sent their National Labor Coordinator, Carl Farris, to assist the strike. Speaking to nearly 100 union organizers packed into Mount Calvary Baptist Church, Farris proposed a mass march through downtown Albany to protest the city commission’s apathy. Like Bartlett, Farris characterized the struggle as one for basic rights. “The march will emphasize our insistence on being treated as human beings in 1972,” Farris said. Speaking in the era of Black Power, Farris portrayed the strike as an integrated campaign for economic justice. “Don’t let anyone mislead you into

---

<sup>15</sup> *Johnson v. City of Albany, Ga.*, 413 F. Supp.; Associated Press, “Workers Vow No Return Until City Recognizes Union”; James H. Gray, Jr., “Meeting Jammed: Citizens Air Views in City,” *The Albany Herald*, April 26, 1972.

thinking your struggle is a black struggle,” Farris said, “your struggle is with the City Commission, who, when elected, promised to work for the welfare of all the citizens.”<sup>16</sup>

Farris, Bartlett, and the rest of the union leadership reached out to the students at Albany State College (ASC), hoping to inject youthful energy into their upcoming march. Union officials and ASC student body leaders addressed a crowd of nearly 300 students at the historically black school, asking them to help bring “the problem of a double pay standard to the attention of the citizens of Albany.” The student body produced a collection of proposals for the city. The usual demand for recognition of Local 1309 topped the list, along with a request that the city fire all workers hired since the strike, arguing that “the practice of using poor whites against poor blacks is an ancient form of [oppression] that we find intolerable.” Students also requested that more blacks be hired to administrative positions “in order to rid our city employment system of tokenism and begin to enjoy the fruits of egalitarianism.” Student body President Robert Allen invoked the name of Martin Luther King, Jr., who had been killed while aiding a sanitation workers strike in Memphis four years earlier. Curtis Garrison, a Memphis native and representative for the United Rubber Workers Union, exhorted the crowd to “fight tooth and toenail to bring this City to its knees.”<sup>17</sup>

Attempts to build a broad coalition seemed to unearth old fissures within Albany’s black community, fissures that union leaders referenced to stir up audiences. Alfred Hazel called out black and white members of the old guard, claiming that “for too

---

<sup>16</sup> Associated Press, “Albany Gets Notification On Records,” *Waycross Journal-Herald*, May 12, 1972, sec. P; Associated Press, “City Strikers Eye Boycott,” *Waycross Journal-Herald*, May 17, 1972, sec. P; David Fuller, “Striking Employees Slate Mass March Here,” *The Albany Herald*, May 16, 1972.

<sup>17</sup> David Fuller, “College Students, Strikers Plan Saturday March Here,” *The Albany Herald*, May 19, 1972; David Fuller, “Striking Employees Slate Mass March Here.”

long the black community leaders have hopped into bed with the power structure, but the leaders coming up in the strike are not going to be bought.” The more aggressive rhetoric marked the genesis of a new activist class in Albany. In the city’s famous direct-action campaign of 1961-1962, leaders came from the professional ranks, and made desegregation the rallying cry of the masses. In 1972, the black working-class of Albany, with assistance from local and outside labor leaders, had placed a living wage and equal employment opportunity at the forefront of their crusade. The more direct tone and tactics also materialized, however, out of necessity.<sup>18</sup>

From day one, the city made plain that it would take any measures necessary to avoid capitulation. Within a day of the strike, City Manager Steven Roos installed collection bins at twenty-four locations to centralize garbage pickup. He began immediately hiring replacement workers, while leaving those who had been fired to deal with the financial implications of their decision. After the firings, the City Credit Union, at the behest of the municipal department chiefs, immediately called in all outstanding loans held by the striking workers. Those who had borrowed against their pension during tough times now saw sizeable chunks taken out of their severance checks. As the strike approached its first month, an ominous realization dawned on the former employees—Roos’s plan was working. Garbage collection had returned to almost 100 percent, leaving 150 fired employees with no reliable income and stacks of bills to pay. The union tried to funnel what money it could to the workers and their families, but that support was finite, and soon dried up. With each passing week of summer 1972, it became clear that the city—for the moment—had won. As the union’s treasury drained, some workers relented

---

<sup>18</sup> David Fuller, “College Students, Strikers Plan Saturday March Here.”

and asked for their old jobs back. "To the extent that job openings were available," the city restored those who returned within 90 days to their old positions. Public Works employees received no punishment for leaving. Employees at the Water, Gas, and Light Department, however, were rehired as new employees, losing all longevity credit that determined salary and benefit levels. Out of the 186 workers that left, fewer than half returned.<sup>19</sup>

The strike ended that summer. By late June, city officials had declared the matter of union recognition officially closed—no more appeals would be heard. To appear sympathetic to the issues brought forth during the strike, the commission adopted a nebulously detailed employee grievance procedure. "There is no conflict between these two moves," the city manager declared, "we have had the grievance committee under consideration long before the problems with the unions."<sup>20</sup>

It had become clear to union leaders and workers that any real progress towards equal employment opportunity would emanate from a courtroom, not city hall.<sup>21</sup> They knew exactly who to call: C.B. King. Still known for his brilliant legal mind and theatrical trial performances, his deep, Shakespearean voice, and his neatly trimmed

---

<sup>19</sup> David Fuller, "Strike Goes On: City Taking Up Measures For Picking Up Garbage," *The Albany Herald*, April 22, 1972; James H. Gray, Jr., "Half of Garbage Pickup on Schedule: Roos," *The Albany Herald*, April 19, 1972; "City Services Near Normal Despite Strike, Says Roos," *The Albany Herald*, April 28, 1972; *Johnson v. City of Albany* Trial Transcript, Steven Roos Testimony, 288.

<sup>20</sup> Ellen Lake, "C.B. King: Silhouette," *Harvard Crimson*, May 13, 1964; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 528; Stephen Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 37, 97; Paul D. Bolster, "Civil Rights Movements in Twentieth Century Georgia" (Unpublished dissertation, University of Georgia, 1978), 157–58.

<sup>21</sup> Bob Gillette, "City on Record Refusing to Recognize Local 1309," *The Albany Herald*, June 30, 1972.



beard and tailored suits, King had continued to spend his days representing the working-class blacks of southwest Georgia.

King braved courtrooms few black lawyers dared enter. In 1958, he secured the release of his brother Clennon, who had been institutionalized at Whitfield Asylum in Mississippi, where he was declared insane for being ambitious enough to apply to Ole Miss. He had been the “one man legal department” of the Albany Movement, working around the clock to defend hundreds of black protesters locked up for marching in the streets. His persistence earned him a cracked skull at the hands of the Dougherty County Sheriff; the picture of his injury—with blood-soaked bandages papered around his head—undercut the myth that police responses to the protests had been completely nonviolent. King’s two ill-fated political campaigns had put him in harm’s way. While on the campaign trail for the Second Congressional District, one of King’s aides discovered that acid had been poured in his seat. He would never drive alone again.<sup>22</sup>

By 1972, with a lifetime of hard work and thwarted political ambition in his rear-view mirror, C.B. King had no major battle staring him in the face. That all changed one spring morning when a group of black municipal workers paid him a visit. “I guess these guys just ultimately got fed up,” attorney Herbert Phipps recounted, “...and they came to the office and I remember C.B. King said, ‘well, are there any others down there that feel

---

<sup>22</sup> Ellen Lake, “C.B. King: Silhouette,” *Harvard Crimson*, May 13, 1964; Peter de Lissovoy, “Odds on Freedom: Gambler’s Choice in Georgia,” *The Nation*, June 22, 1964; “First Georgia Black Runs For Governor,” *The New York Times*, June 5, 1970; Christopher M. Richardson and Ralph E. Luker, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Civil Rights Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 267-268; Randy Battle, “Driving for Attorney C.B. King,” Civil Rights Movement Veterans, <http://www.crmvet.org/nars/rbcbking.htm>.

the way y'all feel?' And next morning when we got to the office, the steps were covered with people, there were just crowds of people out there waiting."<sup>23</sup>

The opening salvo against the city came on April 24, 1972, when King helped file a complaint with the EEOC. Those charges had done little to bring city leaders to the negotiating table. With summer fading, the city showing no signs of capitulation, the union money drying up, and the strike ending, King began pushing the matter into the courts. The first notices went out on August 31, 1972; six city workers—Johnnie Johnson, Ernest Culbreath, Willie Foggy, June Mayo, Lindberg Roberts and Julius Cobb—had filed suit against the City of Albany and the Board of Commissioners. It took over two years for any news—good or bad—to be delivered. Nevertheless, on October 2, 1974, the city's black workers celebrated reports that the suit could be maintained as a class action. The city now found itself locked in a battle with not six, but over 300 aggrieved workers.<sup>24</sup> An extensive discovery pushed the trial back two more years. The court finally heard the case on March 2 and 3, 1976. The trial, though brief, confirmed what Albany's black workers had been saying for years: African Americans were employed only in the lowest paying, non-supervisory, janitorial-laboring type of jobs and were paid less than white employees of the same job classification. Employee facilities—rest rooms, drinking fountains, rest areas, coffee pots—were segregated. Promotional opportunities for blacks were non-existent."<sup>25</sup> The city's own records made the trial's outcome a foregone conclusion. Not only was the evidence overwhelming, but since the city provided the bulk of it, it was also indisputable. Beyond the lopsided employment statistics, King and

---

<sup>23</sup> Herbert Phipps, interview with author, January 7, 2011, Albany, GA (in author's possession).

<sup>24</sup> *Johnson v. City of Albany, Ga.*, 413 F. Supp.

<sup>25</sup> *Johnson v. City of Albany, Ga.*, 413 F. Supp.

Phipps revealed the city's application process to be nothing more than a charade used to provide the appearance of fairness while maintaining the status quo. Even a rudimentary analysis of department applications yielded a wealth of inane questions that did not come close to being relevant to the prospective job. For instance, police aptitude exams presented the following questions:

"Suppose a newly appointed police officer has red hair. It is most probable that this man will:

1. Have a fiery, uncontrollable temper.
2. Be over aggressive.
3. Be much like the other men on the force.
4. Be very stupid.;

Venereal disease can be *best* stamped out by:

- (1) sunbaths and violet ray treatments.
- (2) use of prophylactic measures.
- (3) regulated vice districts.
- (4) education and legal, social, and medical measures."<sup>26</sup>

The question for Judge Wilbur Owens was not whether the city was guilty of de facto segregation, but what should be done to fix the disparity. The answer came on September 2, 1976, when Owens issued a permanent injunction requiring the City of Albany to increase the number and quality of jobs for black applicants. To this end, Owens yoked city hiring practices to the most recent census. In other words, the city would have to maintain "a workforce in which the proportion of total black employees to total white

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

employees viewed (a) overall, (b) by job classification and description, (c) by department, and (d) by rate of pay” was at least equal to the proportion of blacks to whites in the working age population.<sup>27</sup>

Suddenly, the city appeared to have a change of heart, and commissioners surrendered to the coming changes. Officials brought in the consulting firm of Arthur Young & Company, which delivered a multi-volume doorstop of a report detailing uniform job classifications and descriptions, pay rates, employee benefits, and seniority rules. The city commission unanimously approved the report on March 22, 1977, while admitting that their legal counsel had not finished reading it yet. The rest of the city’s higher-ups signed off on the new personnel system, though begrudgingly. Walter Rodemann, head of the Water, Gas, and Light Commission, insisted that “the consultants['] report even though it may not be entirely palatable [sic], is the best product we could come up with.” City Manager Steven Roos likened the report to “a new pair of shoes—they look good, I think they’ll feel fine. They’ve got to be broken in, and they should improve where we are going.” “I suspect the shoe will pinch periodically,” Personnel Director Lee Smit responded.<sup>28</sup>

Judge Owens accepted the new personnel system without making a single change. By the end of March 1977, the city had admitted fault and agreed to revamp the municipal bureaucracy, but the threat of more lawsuits still loomed. In an effort to put the case to bed once and for all, the city voted to settle. Commissioners agreed to the figure

---

<sup>27</sup> *Shealy v. City of Albany, Ga.*, 137 F. Supp. 2d 1359 (Middle District of Georgia, Albany Division, 2001) Summary opinion can be found at <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp2/137/1359/2472372/>.

<sup>28</sup> James Sheppard, “Uniform Personnel Policy Tentatively Adopted,” *The Albany Herald*, March 23, 1977.

of \$605,000, which would be divided up among 500 past and present employees. After sending \$90,000 to the lawyers, claimants received anywhere from \$200 to \$9,000, depending on their length of employment and job classification. The five-year journey for the hundreds involved—from the walkout to the strike to the lawsuit—ended with a trip to the abandoned building on the corner of Monroe Street and Mercer Avenue that once housed the “Busy Spot Grocery.” On May 3 and 4, 1977, black workers trickled into the old store, clutching their Social Security cards and driver’s licenses to claim their restitution for years of mistreatment in the form of a small paper check.<sup>29</sup>

The money helped, but it was hardly enough to make up for the years of paucity of paychecks and pay that had vanished after city bosses fired employees for attempting to unionize. The new personnel system, however, could provide more concrete opportunities for black workers, as long as it remained intact. But the success of the lawsuit planted seeds of discontent among many whites. The economic playing field had been altered, and while its supporters celebrated the new system as more fair and standardized, some white employees felt they were being unnecessarily punished. Given the right conditions, cracks would begin to appear in the community’s support of the court order.

Nevertheless, throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, Albany moderated, becoming more inclusive and open to the idea of black people taking on positions of limited power. That moderation came on the heels of newly gained political power, which Albany's black citizens secured through the legal system. Following a 1975 court

---

<sup>29</sup> James Sheppard; James Sheppard, “Albany Personnel Management Plan Approved by Judge Owens,” *The Albany Herald*, May 1, 1977; Gary McElroy, “Cash Awards Readied,” *The Albany Sunday Herald*, May 2, 1977.

order from Judge Wilbur Owens, Albany bid farewell to its most effective method of black voter suppression—the at-large system. Officials broke the city up into five wards, two of which were majority-black. One year later, Mary Young and Robert Montgomery became the first African Americans to serve on the City Commission. In 1977, longtime activist Charles Sherrod won the newly created Ward 6 post. It seemed as though every day Albany’s black community stepped closer towards real political representation.<sup>30</sup>

While the political landscape of Albany shifted in the post-*Johnson* era, the workplace remained largely stagnant. As the 1980s rolled on, it became clear that if black workers were to climb department ladders, they would do so under a cloud of suspicion from many of their white peers. That suspicion began to surface in a series of complaints and lawsuits that would punctuate the last two decades of the twentieth century. In 1982, Albany State, the city’s long-standing historically black college, became one of the first major affirmative action battlegrounds.

If only for a day, Albany made national headlines again on November 26, 1982, when the New York Times ran a story titled “Black College Biased.” The initial complaint came from Dr. John Moore, a professor of history who felt he and another white colleague had been unfairly passed over for the chairmanship of the department in favor of Dr. Veula Rhodes, their only black female colleague. Moore’s sense of indignation was shared by Dougherty County Judge Eugene Black, though not for the reason he expected. Black ruled that yes, the school had discriminated, but not against Moore. Instead, he claimed the school should have promoted his white colleague, Dr.

---

<sup>30</sup> *Paige v. Gray*, 399 F. Supp. 459 (Middle District of Georgia, Albany Division, 1975) Summary opinion can be found at <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/399/459/1489415/>; Gary McElroy, “Blacks Win Two Races,” *The Albany Herald*, October 5, 1977.

Jesse Silverglade, who had since moved to Miami and refused to add his name to the complaint. It seemed that Moore had been denied the job “because he was judged by the promotion committee to be unable to get along with others.” That left the combative professor without the chair he sought. He responded by threatening a class-action suit that never materialized.<sup>31</sup>

Moore became the first, but not the last white man to protest his victimization at the hands of an overbearing court order. But while Moore lacked the social skills to earn his desired promotion, Major Dale Mann of the Albany Police Department seemed an able and qualified applicant. By 1985, Mann had served thirteen years in law enforcement, including the last six as director of the Albany Police Academy. In April of 1985, Mann joined three other officers in applying for the vacant position of Assistant Police Chief. The job ended up going to the only black officer who applied, Colonel Washington Long. By June, Mann started questioning how he could have been passed over for the position. It could have been that Long had been an officer since 1966 (one of Albany’s first African Americans to wear the badge), or that he outranked Mann, or that he held the respect of his peers from nearly two decades of service on the force. Police Chief Norman Denney saw Long’s qualifications, but Personnel Director Bruce Townshend cast new doubt on the hiring with a letter addressed to Mann explaining that the choice had been made out of necessity to comply with Judge Owens’s court order. The new protocol after the Johnson decision mandated that half of all job vacancies within the police force be filled by hiring or promoting black applicants. Since the

---

<sup>31</sup> Associated Press, “Black College Biased, Judge Rules,” *Daytona Beach Morning Journal*, November 26, 1982.

outgoing Assistant Chief, who had been demoted for “disciplinary reasons” happened to be white, the Chief’s hands were tied.<sup>32</sup>

Mann’s lawyer Nathan Davis rested his case on the Fourteenth Amendment, announcing that “they (city officials) can rely on the judge’s order, but we are going to rely on the Constitution.” Three years of discovery followed, during which the plaintiffs attempted a delicate balancing act—they were not challenging Owens’ 1976 order *per se*, but rather the personnel system formed in its wake. By using quotas to remedy past discrimination, the City of Albany had effectively trampled on Mann’s constitutional rights and betrayed the spirit of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. District Judge Duross Fitzpatrick bought some of the argument, but still dismissed Mann’s complaint. Yes, Mann had standing to sue for reverse discrimination, but he could not separate Judge Owens’s order from the new personnel system. Without divorcing the two, Fitzpatrick held up Owens’s permanent injunction, and justified the City’s decision to hire Washington Long as Assistant Police Chief.<sup>33</sup>

By the time Duross Fitzpatrick ruled that Washington Long deserved to be Assistant Police Chief, he had already become Head Police Chief. Dale Mann could not accept that judgment. He wanted the job, he wanted back wages, and he wanted his attorney’s fees paid. By the time his appeal came to trial in 1989, Mann was armed with

---

<sup>32</sup> Mickey Mills, “Mann Sues City for Reverse Discrimination,” *The Albany Herald*, October 3, 1985; Mickey Mills, “Policeman Files Reverse Discrimination Suit,” *The Albany Sunday Herald*, December 14, 1985.

<sup>33</sup> *Mann v. City of Albany*, 687 F. Supp. 583 (Middle District of Georgia, Albany Division, 1988) Summary opinion for the original case can be found at <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/399/459/1489415/>; Bill Strickland, “Judge Rules Against Mann,” *The Albany Herald*, June 4, 1988, sec. A; *Mann v. City of Albany*, Ga., 883 F. 2d 999 (Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, Atlanta, GA, 1989) Summary opinion for the appeal can be found at <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F2/883/999/350293/>.



more resources and a shifting affirmative action jurisprudence. Now he had the weight of the Southeastern Legal Foundation (SELF) behind him, a conservative public interest firm based in Atlanta. Founded by Leonard Theberg in 1975, SELF took part in lawsuits aimed at rolling back business regulations, environmental restrictions, union activities, and affirmative action orders. Its board consisted of nineteen prominent businessmen, mostly high-level executives of the South's largest corporations.<sup>34</sup>

1989 had been a devastating year for civil rights advocates. Within a few months, the Supreme Court handed down two decisions that severely weakened the legal underpinnings of affirmative action. In *Richmond v. Croson*, the Court held that the Constitution mandated "strict scrutiny" of all race-based policies of state and local governments. Racial preferences and set-asides could be used, but only if they were "narrowly tailored to remedy the effects of prior discrimination" and only when it was determined that no racially neutral alternative remedy could be used. Shortly thereafter, in *Wards Cove v. Atonio* the Court shifted the burden of proof in two crucial ways: it held that companies could justify practices that had a disparate impact by proving that the measures served a legitimate business purpose, and it forced those bringing allegations of illegal discrimination to prove that the practices did not serve a valid business objective.<sup>35</sup>

---

<sup>34</sup> Oliver A. Houck, "With Charity for All," *Yale Law Journal* 93, no. 8 (July 1984) 1498-1502.

<sup>35</sup> Raymond Wolters, *Right Turn: William Bradford Reynolds, The Reagan Administration, and Black Civil Rights* (Transaction Publishers, 1996), 292-93. In its immediate aftermath, the *Croson* decision led to a slew of debates among legal scholars, political scientists, and sociologists. For more about the effects of the case, see Charles Fried, "Affirmative Action after *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*: A Response to the Scholars' Statement," *The Yale Law Journal* 99, no. 1 (1989): 155-61; Gregg Ivers and Karen O'Connor, "Minority Set-Aside Programs in the States after *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*," *Publius* 20, no. 3 (1990): 63-78.

Operating in the shadow of those decisions, the Eleventh Circuit reopened the case and sent it back to the District Court to be re-litigated. Unwilling to spend another day in court, city commissioners began negotiating a settlement with Mann. In the meantime, the city began taking measures to ward off future legal assaults. In the spring of 1990, a special committee met to “examine” the 1976 hiring order. The committee itself, staffed by a majority-black slate of city commissioners, underscored the accretion of black political power since the 1970s. Revisiting the order had become a necessity since the Supreme Court’s narrowing of affirmative action protocol now opened the city to more lawsuits. Even as the committee met, City Manager Nick Meiszer claimed that “the goals and quotas established by the court have yet to be met.” In the years to come, community leaders would argue over the order’s original intent and how close the city had come to fulfilling its objective.<sup>36</sup>

While the special committee conducted its lengthy “fact-finding mission,” the fate of the order loomed in the background, reminding everyone at city hall that a big decision was coming. The first grumblings of discontent came from City Commissioner Arthur Williams, who resigned his post on the special committee in October 1990 “to send a message to the 100 or so employees currently covered under Johnson vs. the City of Albany that he will not attempt to do anything to hinder their jobs.” Williams continued to protest what he felt was a steady effort by the city to de-fang Judge Owens’s mandate. At an April 1991 meeting, Williams continued protesting, adding that “after 15 years

---

<sup>36</sup> Mike Shepard, “Court Order Committee Begins Work,” *The Albany Sunday Herald*, April 4, 1990.

under the court order and after having lived in this City for 45 years he didn't see this City coming to grips with its racial problem."<sup>37</sup>

Discussions over the order went from casual to tense in November 1992 after city commissioners voted to settle the nearly decade-long Mann case to the tune of \$50,000. Determined to avoid future payouts, Albany Mayor Paul Keenan appointed yet another special committee of politicians and local residents to craft a new affirmative action plan to help the city "escape" the 1976 hiring order. The motion divided the city commission along racial lines. Commissioner Henry Mathis agreed to study the issue and present it to Judge Owens, but was "concerned that certain undercurrents continue to go on under this table that might not be best for the city of Albany." "Unless we can chart a course where we send the right signals," he added, "I would hope and pray that somebody would continue to oversee things." David Williams, commissioner of historically black Ward 6, voted against revisiting the order at all. "If you have a car and it's not broken," he said, "why try and fix it?"<sup>38</sup>

Seven months passed while the committee hit the books, producing a report in June 1993 that provided enough cover for the City Commission to unravel the old personnel system. It was true that Albany had achieved the numerical goals set forth in Judge Owens's order. From 1976 to 1992, 55.2 percent of all new hires were black, while

---

<sup>37</sup> "Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the City of Albany, Georgia," October 9, 1990, 5. Full meeting minutes can be found at [https://www.municode.com/library/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic\\_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141990\\_10\\_09PDF](https://www.municode.com/library/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141990_10_09PDF); "Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the City of Albany, Georgia," April 9, 1991, 3-4. Full meeting minutes can be found at [https://www.municode.com/library/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic\\_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141991\\_04\\_09PDF](https://www.municode.com/library/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141991_04_09PDF).

<sup>38</sup> Steven Masters, "Panel to Devise Affirmative Action Plan," *The Albany Sunday Herald*, November 18, 1992.

44.8 percent were white. At the dawn of the new year in 1993, Albany's municipal workforce was certainly desegregated—50.6 percent white, 49.45 percent black. Mayor Pro Tem Doug Everett looked happily on the report, boasting that “the work that has been done by (the committee) can be used to easily get us out from under the court order.”<sup>39</sup>

Of course, not everyone shared Everett's enthusiasm. William Wright, president of the Albany chapter of the NAACP, shed new light on the figures presented by the commission. Yes, the city fulfilled its quantitative obligations set out in Judge Owen's order, but subverted the intent of the ruling by funneling more blacks into public works and sanitation jobs while whites continued to dominate administration and finance posts. Wright made his point by examining the Water, Gas, and Light Department, where white males—except for General Manager Lemuel Edwards—commanded upper-level management. By and large, black workers remained in lower echelon jobs that put less money in their pockets and offered little opportunity for advancement.<sup>40</sup>

It all came to a head on December 14, 1993—the last City Commission meeting before Christmas. As the vote to adopt the new personnel policy loomed, Albany's two black commissioners, Arthur Williams and David Williams (no relation) made their final stand against the replacement, though it soon became clear that the numbers were against them. The plan itself seemed rather skeletal, they claimed. “At best this is the framework of honorable intentions,” David Williams remarked. It was true, the plan had only one general goal—to “achieve a work force representative of the voting age population.” How it would achieve and maintain that goal, however, remained a mystery. The three-man

---

<sup>39</sup> Steven Masters, “Albany Has Achieved Minority Goals,” *The Albany Herald*, June 16, 1993.

<sup>40</sup> Steven Masters, “Opinions Mixed on City Hirings,” *The Albany Sunday Herald*, November 22, 1992.

drafting crew removed any mention of the original court order, and there were no explicit census figures included or specific policies mentioned that would force managers to hire accordingly. The obtuse nature of the plan led David Williams to characterize it as “a baby that has been born to die.” Those criticisms were unfair, said the rest of the commission. Doug Everett put it most vividly, expressing confusion as to why a historically disadvantaged group would oppose a new plan with such rhetorical commitments to equality. “That’s like putting us at the back of the bus like y’all were,” he added.<sup>41</sup>

Those in favor of adopting the new plan claimed it was meant to enhance, not escape Judge Owens’s order. Commissioners coupled that argument with a call to break away from the shackles of the past. George Ort lauded the plan as a necessary addendum to Owens’s order, which had not fulfilled its promises. “I see that 17 years of being under a court order that had not been accomplished is just bad news for both communities,” he argued. Ort added that the court order “should have been completed within a reasonable length of time and 17 years is absolutely too long and definitely not reasonable.” Others echoed Ort’s criticisms, insisting that the order had run its course and deserved alteration. “All I am asking for gentlemen,” Doug Everett responded, “please, let’s not let the wrongs of the past, and I can assure you there were wrongs in the past, instill [sic] [us] from doing what is right in the future.” One of the last speakers to address the commission was local NAACP president William Wright. Hearing claims that the order

---

<sup>41</sup> “Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the City of Albany, Georgia,” December 14, 1993, 8-19. Full meeting minutes can be found at [https://www.municode.com/library/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic\\_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141993\\_12\\_14PDF](https://www.municode.com/library/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141993_12_14PDF); Heather Sumner, “Affirmative Action Plan Changes Nixed: City Commission Rejects Requests for New Name, Mention of Court Order,” *The Albany Herald*, December 22, 1993.

should have accomplished more, he responded: “how do you recompense all of the wrongness that people have under gone for nearly a century? You cannot overcome that in 17 years.” White commissioners said it was a step forward, black commissioners said it was a step backward. Nevertheless, the motion passed 5-2 along racial lines.<sup>42</sup>

The city insisted that the new hiring plan was not intended to provoke Judge Owens to revisit his 1976 order. And yet less than a month passed from its adoption before word came down from Macon that indeed, Judge Owens would meet with city officials to discuss lifting his injunction. On January 10, 1994, he wrote in a letter to the city attorney that due to the passage of time and “what appear to be changed circumstances,” perhaps a frank discussion about the order was warranted. On February 23, 1994, Owens met with City Attorney Al Grieshaber and local lawyer Chevene B. King, 22 years after his late father C.B. King had agreed to take on the municipal workers’ case. What took place in the meeting remained unclear to Albany’s residents for another year, though most could see the handwriting on the wall.<sup>43</sup>

On May 23, 1995, after nearly twenty years, affirmative action—paid for with marches, pickets, firings, and countless negotiations—was no more. It would be replaced with the city’s new system, which had the spirit of the original order but not the teeth. Congratulations went all around. The first came from Judge Owens himself, who noted that while “the object of the order was not to achieve absolute parity,” the city should “be commended for its cooperative effort to end racial discrimination in (its) employment.” Owens seemed at peace with his decision to roll back the injunction, and stood firm against attempts by black leaders to dissuade him. Those opposed to the order’s

---

<sup>42</sup> “Commission Minutes,” December 14, 1993, 8-19.

<sup>43</sup> Gary A. White, “Judge Lifts City Hiring Order,” *Albany Herald*, May 23, 1995.

elimination varied their arguments from cool and legalistic to emotional and heated. King, emulating his father's polished erudition, presented two black city employees who testified that they had been unfairly passed over for promotions. He cited statistics provided by the city showing the lack of progress toward management positions for black workers. He argued that the order should only be modified rather than scrapped. City Judge Owens waved away the evidence, maintaining that King had not provided any hard facts to prove discrimination had persisted. To clarify his position, Owens claimed that the original order "was not intended to guarantee anyone a job." Commissioner Arthur Williams lamented that "in 20 years (discrimination) has not corrected itself," and called for an appointed civilian panel to mediate disputes between management and workers. NAACP head William Wright protested further, arguing that the court's decision was "tantamount to sending the city back to a 'separate but equal' status for black city employees." Their protests fell on deaf ears.<sup>44</sup>

A decade before the Johnson strike, Albany's city fathers had maintained the same hard line stance against black protestors demanding an end to segregation. Day after day, week after week, Mayor Asa Kelley and city commissioners held firm in the face of mass protests, national press campaigns, and even overtures from President John F. Kennedy. Throughout the Albany Movement, there would be no meaningful negotiations between black protestors and the white establishment. That intransigence, coupled with Police Chief Laurie Pritchett's effective strategy of mass-yet-peaceful incarceration, dulled the movement's impact. In 1972, local politicians used the same playbook that had proved so effective ten years earlier to neutralize the threat of municipal unionization.

---

<sup>44</sup> Gary A. White; Associated Press, "Judge Removes Order for Hiring in Albany," *Rome News-Tribune*, May 23, 1995.

They chose blanket obstruction over cooperation to maintain the status quo, and if not for Judge Wilbur Owens, they would have succeeded.

For those who have seen Albany up close over the last five decades, the changes produced by the city workers strike of 1972 had a more lasting and real impact on African Americans than the “classical period’s” direct-action protests. The marches of 1961-62, however, did form part of a broader nationwide collection of protest campaigns that birthed the ’64 Civil Rights Act and the OEO, which provided a launching pad for the Johnson case. Nevertheless, the lawsuit “did more to desegregate Albany than any other litigation,” according to Herbert Phipps, one of the original attorneys on the case, “and as a result of that we got black department heads, black personnel directors, we often had black police chiefs, blacks over all kinds of departments.” African Americans saw the order as a necessary corrective that did not go far enough to ensure upward mobility for black workers, while many whites perceived it as an undue punishment motivated by reverse racism. Unlike Albany’s direct-action campaigns of the 1960s that played out over months or years, the fight for equal employment opportunity lasted decades.<sup>45</sup>

*Johnson v. City of Albany* threw southwest Georgia into the national conversation about affirmative action at a time when the concept had only started its ascent into the public lexicon. The strike that gave birth to the lawsuit demonstrated that the black community had not forgotten the power of mass protest since the direct-action campaigns of the Albany Movement a decade earlier. But while the spirit of protest echoed that of years past, the cast of activists differed. In the place of middle-class leaders like Dr.

---

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Phipps, interview with author, January 7, 2011, Albany, GA (in author's possession).



William G. Anderson and Slater King stood Johnnie Johnson and Arthur Mayo, entry-level sanitation workers who, like their hundreds of black colleagues, spent their workdays collecting garbage bags in the street. Johnson, Mayo, and the striking workers of the City of Albany couched their rhetoric in the concerns of the black working class—the right to earn a living wage, to work in an integrated environment, and to rise as high as one’s merit would allow.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### “LET JUSTICE ROLL DOWN LIKE WATER”: THE FLINT RIVER FLOOD OF 1994 AND THE STRUGGLE TO REBUILD SOUTHWEST GEORGIA

By the time Wilbur Owens terminated his order, the fate of municipal hiring had been largely swept under the rug by the forces of nature. In early July 1994, Tropical Storm Alberto drenched southwest Georgia, blanketing Albany with rain and filling its streets with a torrent of muddy water from the overflowing Flint River. The flood hit the black community—concentrated heavily on the south and east sides of town near the river—particularly hard, forcing nearly 20,000 people from their homes. As the waters receded, they unearthed a trail of destruction throughout the city. The recovery process brought President Bill Clinton to Albany, who toured the region in a helicopter, pledging millions of dollars in support. In the years following his departure, however, the structural inequalities of "The Good Life City" would be exacerbated, as poor and working-class blacks struggled to rebuild their lives. For those staring personal and financial disaster in the face, the pay grades of black municipal workers suddenly seemed less dire.

Resentment and tension brewed from the start of the flood, when many residents of the historically-black south side of town began accusing white city leaders of diverting floodwaters towards them to save white neighborhoods. Although they held little concrete evidence, those who accused the city of wrongdoing did so largely out of frustration for the years of mistreatment and neglect visited upon the struggling black

parts of town. When the federal funds came in to rebuild the schools, parks, and houses swept away by the flood, a drawn-out fight ensued between Albany's black community and FEMA administrators, who wanted to rebuild most of the structures far away from the Flint River floodplain, away from the historic neighborhood that sustained them for decades prior. The fight to preserve established black neighborhoods highlighted the importance of place in Albany. Though they knew the small patches of land near the river were not the ideal locations to rebuild, those who lived there couldn't stomach the idea of moving. The buildings became more than just brick and mortar. They were symbols of the black community itself. The struggle to preserve that community, which still suffered from concentrated poverty and segregation in the 1990s, demonstrated the vibrant spirit that had driven Albany to the front lines of the civil rights movement had not vanished and would be needed to carve a path forward into the twenty-first century.

On June 18, 1994, the weather system that would give birth to the worst natural disaster in Southwest Georgia's history began as a tropical wave off the coast of Senegal. From there it moved west across the Atlantic Ocean until it hit the Virgin Islands, dumping thunderstorms over the Caribbean Sea until petering out a few days later near the Bahamas. By June 29, however, the wave had limped to Cuba, where it regained its strength and rained torrents down upon the island nation. At this point, alarm bells went off at the National Hurricane Center in Miami, where meteorologists noticed a faint swirl churning through the storm. A recon plane was sent to take a better look, and when the data came back the storm had congealed into a loosely ordered system off the west coast of Cuba. As it shoved off the coast, the storm marched northwest into the Gulf of Mexico and headed right for the Florida panhandle. On the night of July 1, as it aimed to

make landfall, the previously anonymous fusion of wind, thunder, and cloudburst was given a name: Tropical Storm Alberto.<sup>1</sup>

As the storm brewed down in the Gulf, Southwest Georgia prepared to celebrate Independence Day. Every July 4<sup>th</sup> for the last thirty years the good people of Albany piled into their cars and drove to the Chehaw Wild Animal Park, one hundred acres of public land that'd been converted into a zoo in the 1970s under the watchful guidance of Johnny Carson's go-to animal man, Jim Fowler. Once a year though, as the afternoon sun burned off into dusk on that most special of national holidays, human and beast alike honored the Founding Fathers by marveling at the cheap fluorescent pyrotechnics that painted the evening sky in schizophrenic gashes of red, white, and blue. But as they packed up their picnic baskets and blankets in preparation for the coming festivities, Albanians were stopped in their tracks by the unwelcome news: there would be no fireworks tonight.<sup>2</sup>

The festivities had been sidelined on account of the 3-5 inches of rain that Alberto—downgraded the day before to a “Tropical Depression”—had dumped on Albany. The forecast for the coming week suggested nothing more than a series of normal downpours. “Rainy conditions were expected to continue today and through Wednesday morning,” read the local reports, after which “the balmy and humid summer weather would return.” But the rain kept coming. July 5<sup>th</sup> brought another two inches, and with each drop the Flint River swelled just a bit more, and as it grew there came talk of

---

<sup>1</sup> Jim Hendricks, “Weather Conditions in 1994 Were Perfect for Disastrous Alberto,” *Albany Herald*, June 26, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Bondurant and Judi Hampton Thompson, “Storm Fizzles out Plan for Fireworks,” *Albany Herald*, July 5, 1994; “The Flood of 1994: July 5 - Trouble on the Horizon,” *Albany Herald*, July 3, 2014.

potential flooding. On the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup>, the National Weather Service (NWS) confirmed the rumors: there would be at least a 31-foot crest,<sup>3</sup> enough to send water rushing into the streets of downtown Albany. The afternoon brought updated—and worse—predictions. The NWS now estimated the Flint would top out at 36-37 feet, which would surpass the highest mark recorded in thirty years.<sup>4</sup> In hindsight, those estimates would prove to be wildly conservative.<sup>5</sup>

By Wednesday, July 6<sup>th</sup>, the gravity of the situation had sunk in. A torrent of water spilled over the muddy banks of the Flint and careened toward the city. In neighboring Sumter County, where 21 inches of rain had fallen in a 24-hour span, thirteen were already dead. The majority of those deaths came on the highways, where terrified drivers were swept off the road in an instant. Depth perceptions became skewed. “You can’t tell if it’s just a few inches, or 10 feet deep and washed out,” one official said. Police responded by closing down the roads. U.S. 82, the major artery northward out of Albany, was shut down. Overflowing creeks burst through earthen farm dams and surrounded the Sumter County seat of Americus, turning the town into an island. The worst news, however, came from farther north in Macon, where the rivers had yet to crest—but were well on their way. Weak winds had stalled the remnants of Alberto, and those ominous clouds hovered over central Georgia, dumping their contents below. All that water was pooling into the Flint, and would soon turn south. “The rivers haven’t even crested in Macon yet,” warned Jim Parker, spokesman for the Army Corps of Engineers, “and all that water is headed down to you in Albany.” Observers began to talk

---

<sup>3</sup> Flood stage for the Flint River was 20 feet.

<sup>4</sup> The highest point in recent memory had been 34.7 feet, recorded in 1966.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Bondurant and Judi Hampton Thompson, “Storm Fizzles out Plan for Fireworks”; “The Flood of 1994–July 5.”

of a “100-year flood,” and local officials feared that this would be “the worst ever.”

Again, those pronouncements would prove to be conservative.<sup>6</sup>

As Thursday dawned, it brought a fresh sense of panic in Albany. New forecasts surfaced with apocalyptic prophecies: by Saturday the river would crest at 45 feet. The Flint had broken free of its banks, opening up a floodway ten times wider than the river itself that twisted through the city like a bloated snake. Officials pleaded with the 14,000 residents of the floodplain to leave their homes. The river was heading straight for south Albany, home to the city’s black working class. Emergency workers canvassed every door in the neighborhood to convince people to leave. Most did, but a few skeptics decided to wait it out. In the poor black neighborhoods of south Albany, friends and family scrambled to throw their belongings into the beds of pickup trucks. At the Albany Housing Authority, police officers escorted the last family out of the complex just as the Flint River crashed into their front yard. Others weren’t so lucky. For many, the waters had rushed in too early, forcing them to rooftops and tree branches where they waited to be rescued. Throughout the city, emergency workers drove through endangered neighborhoods, blaring the same message through their bullhorns: “The water is coming.” In the midst of the chaos, Hilda Hazel lugged furniture out of her sister’s house on South Washington Street. “It’s frightening,” she said, “I’ve always read about people being evacuated at times like this, but I’ve never been evacuated. We just don’t know what’s gonna happen to us.” “I’ve never seen water in this street, and now the whole

---

<sup>6</sup> “The Flood of 1994: July 6 - Flood ‘the Worst Ever,’” *Albany Herald*, July 4, 2014; John Cheves, “Waters Kill Nine in Sumter County,” *Albany Herald*, July 7, 1994; Heather Sumner, “Waters Wreak Havoc on Roadways,” *Albany Herald*, July 7, 1994.

place is flooded in a matter of minutes,” Latoya Lowe remarked as she stood on her front steps, “This is incredible.”<sup>7</sup>

By noon, all roads leading south out of Albany were choked with automobiles. Those who stayed behind crushed the local stores, piling their carts with bottled water, containers, fuel, flashlights, batteries, and lanterns. Georgia Power began shutting down electric grids in certain areas “to save equipment and increase safety.” Mountains of sandbags were erected in a fledgling attempt to fortify buildings against the coming waves. Nursing home residents were evacuated. At the local hospital, all non-emergency surgeries were canceled. Phone services were overloaded. Would-be callers were greeted with infinite busy tones. Those who could left town or shacked up with family members. Others searched for hotel rooms, but that was already a long shot. “They could maybe find one,” said George Bryan, general manager of the Holiday Inn Express, “but they’re far and few between.” Meanwhile, an army of yellow-dog school buses revved up to transport those with nowhere else to go to the overflowing shelters at nearby high schools. Nightfall brought the most sobering news yet: all bridges crossing the Flint—which ran north and south through the city—had been shut down. Albany had been cut in two. As the residents of east Albany grappled with the knowledge that they were now

---

<sup>7</sup> “The Flood of 1994: July 7 - Albany a City Divided,” *Albany Herald*, July 5, 2014; Heather Sumner, “The ‘500-Year-Flood’ Washes over Albany,” *Albany Herald*, July 9, 1994; Todd Douglas, “Customers Swamp Stores to Prepare for the Worst,” *Albany Herald*, July 8, 1994; John Cheves, “Flint River Drives 14,000 from Their Homes in Albany,” *Albany Herald*, July 8, 1994; Peter Applebome, “Georgia Tries to Make Sense of Flood That Comes Once in 500 Years,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 1994.

completely isolated, across town horrified residents watched as unearthed coffins bobbed and floated throughout the city streets.<sup>8</sup>

While Albany drowned under the weight of the worst flood anyone had ever seen, President Bill Clinton sat comfortably in the padded leather seats of Air Force One as the plane crisscrossed the European skies. Clutching the telephone, he spoke with an old friend and one of the last prominent, white, southern Democrats, Governor Zell Miller. Born in 1932 in the small north Georgia mountain town of Young Harris, Zell—or “Zig-Zag Zell,” as his critics knew him—was the quintessential southern politician. Armed with a pronounced mountain twang, a thick, polished dome of silver hair, cold blue eyes, and a face that looked like it’d been hacked out of an old beige piece of granite, he looked and acted the part of the local country club glad-hander. He had traversed the rocky shoals of the Dixiecrat-to-Democrat road, having made his early congressional campaigns on explicit promises to oppose any civil rights legislation. He had cut his political teeth as Chief of Staff for arch-segregationist Governor Lester Maddox, famous (or infamous) for his ax-handle-wielding, “over my dead body,” Alamo-like defense of the old, segregated, way of life. Like many of his political breed, Miller squirmed, twisted, and somehow contorted himself by the mid-70s into the frame of a southern progressive. The new look suited him. He became Lieutenant Governor. By 1990, the old Zell was unrecognizable. He ran to the left of *Andrew Young*, the black civil rights icon and Atlanta mayor, en route to the governor’s mansion. He nearly bit off more than he could chew though, and now stared at a tough knife fight of a re-election. Guy Millner and his operatives were

---

<sup>8</sup> “The Flood of 1994,” July 5, 2014; Applebome, “Georgia Tries to Make Sense of Flood That Comes Once in 500 Years”; Todd Douglas, “Customers Swamp Stores to Prepare for the Worst”; John Cheves, “Flint River Drives 14,000 from Their Homes in Albany”; Heather Sumner, “Flint Waters Inundate Area,” *Albany Herald*, July 8, 1994.



running daily attacks on Miller for his ardent stump speech for his old friend Bill at the '94 Democratic Convention. Throughout the campaign, his friends sensed Zell's appetite for politics was fading. But—like every man who has somehow believed he was *special*, that he was destined for great things, destined to speak into microphones in front of thousands—Miller craved the spotlight. And now here it was, his moment to step up and take the reins, to shepherd his fellow Georgians through this dark night of the soul. And shepherd them he did. At this moment, he was buttressing his future stump speeches by engaging in the ancient political art of asking for things. Would the President, he inquired, please see his way to declaring Dougherty County a federal disaster area, making it eligible for the cascading streams of federal largesse so necessary to its rebuilding? The answer came back in unequivocal tones: yes.<sup>9</sup>

The designation was met with a sigh of relief from Albany politicians, who knew that big federal dollars would be needed to restore their underwater town. Federal relief money, for many, would be their only hope. The fact was that most Georgians, especially those in Albany, didn't have flood insurance of any kind. State Farm, the largest insurer in the state, held half a million homeowners' policies. Out of those half million, only 8,500 included flood damage riders. The federally-subsidized National Flood Insurance Program was another option, but relatively few people owned such policies or even knew the program existed. And so, worried homeowners from all over southwest Georgia looked to Washington for relief. But many soon learned a sobering fact: most federal

---

<sup>9</sup> Ed Kilgore, "The Remarkable, Maddening Career of Zell Miller," *Daily Intelligencer*, March 23, 2018; "The Flood of 1994: July 8 - East Albany Isolated," *Albany Herald*, July 6, 2014.

disaster money came in the form of low-interest loans, not grants. They would still have to pay to reconstruct their lives.<sup>10</sup>

As that news circulated, residents of east Albany awoke on the morning of Friday, July 8th to find they were still under siege from the Flint. East Albany, like south Albany, was largely poor, largely working class, and largely black. Most of the stores and restaurants east Albanians relied on lay across the now-closed bridges that connected their neighborhood to the rest of the city. The rising waters had not only divided the town in half, but divided families as well. Ellen Powell, a stranded eastsider, had been separated from her wheelchair-bound mother, who had been ferried across the other side of the river. As she languished in a rescue shelter at the Dougherty Comprehensive High School, she sounded a common lament, one she shared with 1,500 other displaced neighbors: "There's no place to go. I feel terrible." George Brown, an African American county commissioner, local business owner, and a community leader prominent in the poor black enclaves of south and east Albany, saw his life washed away. His home at 617 Albert Court, two of his family's cars, and two of his three businesses now sat underwater. "I haven't felt like this since I lost my mother," Brown confessed, holding one hand over his face. As he stood in front of his last surviving business, Six Point Dry Cleaners, he ignored the waves and hellos from passing neighbors. Brown was too busy on the payphone, calling his customers, barking out the same warning: "Come get your clothes. Now." After making his calls, Brown and his wife Eva would retreat to their daughter's home farther away and higher up from the river. "I've got no idea what I'm gonna do," he said, "I guess we've got to start over." As the dispossessed grieved for

---

<sup>10</sup> "Most Insurers Won't Cover Damage from Flood," *Albany Herald*, July 8, 1994.

their lost homes, Albany State College—the educational beacon of the black community that’d stood perilously close to the Flint River banks for nearly a century—lay underwater. Albany policemen gritted their teeth and prayed that the crucial series of earthworks that’d suppressed the worst of the flood so far would hold. “If the dam in Cordele don’t burst,” Lieutenant Eddie Williams mused, “we’ll be in good shape.” But that was a big “if.”<sup>11</sup>

As the afternoon sun burned through the southwest Georgia clouds on Saturday, July 9th, a thin middle-aged white man, bald-headed, cloaked in an old white t-shirt with the words “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” on the front, guided a sputtering fishing boat through what used to be the streets of south Albany. Joel Abernathy, an Albany Parks and Rec employee, had steered his boat toward the Oakview Cemetery around noon the day before to join an ongoing project: rescuing the dead. All through the night, Abernathy and his fellow volunteers teamed up with a group of twenty Marines and Air Force servicemen. Short on sleep and fueled by a perpetual supply of stale coffee, they had worked themselves to exhaustion, lassoing runaway caskets and stuffing floating cadavers into body bags. It was the stuff of nightmares. The dead weren’t just rising—they were exploding out of the water with volcanic force, up to six feet in the air at times. One cemetery employee told stories of caskets “popping up like popcorn.” Fire Chief Jim Carswell used a different analogy. “You know how a beachball shoots up after you hold it under the water? Well, it’s sort of like that.” As the day droned on, workers loaded up their boats with body bags, taking the former residents of Albany to an undisclosed

---

<sup>11</sup> Coretta Gooden and David Milliner, “East Albany Left Isolated from City,” *Albany Herald*, July 9, 1994; Heather Sumner, “The ‘500-Year-Flood’ Washes over Albany”; John Cheves, “Black Community Leader Laments Damage,” *Albany Herald*, July 9, 1994; “The Flood of 1994,” July 6, 2014.

location where they would be refrigerated and hopefully identified. Initial reports put the number of floating caskets at 200. The actual count was over twice that. Farther upstream, the Flint began spilling over the thick concrete walls of the Lake Blackshear Dam, swelling the river higher and ensuring that floodwaters in Albany would take longer than expected to recede. The breaching of the dam didn't look as dramatic on TV—there was no giant downward cascading stream of water as it piled over the wall. The water just stood there on both sides of the dam, slowly inching southward. “There’s no particular push to it,” John Sperry, a former city engineer reported, “there will be no wall of water crashing down on Albany.” Instead of the catastrophic wave some feared, the Flint River simply stagnated, ballooning into a giant lake that squatted over the city, refusing to budge.<sup>12</sup>

On Sunday, July 10th, as the Flint hovered mercilessly across Albany, parts of the city no one expected to flood began taking on water. Albany’s water system had been compromised. Like a virus, the river had spread down into the city infrastructure. Water began bubbling out of storm drains and manhole covers, weaponizing the city’s own sewer system against it, bringing new torrents of brown water to previously undamaged homes. City Manager Roy Lane pleaded with his fellow townspeople, asking them to “avoid long showers, flush toilets infrequently and don’t wash dishes or clothes until the worst of the flood passes.” At the river’s expanding flanks, surprised residents learned that they too must evacuate, forcing police and rescue workers to assist neighborhoods over a mile away from the river. Tempers ran short. “If our people seem kind of rude to

---

<sup>12</sup> Allan Taylor and John Zenor, “Hundreds of Coffins Unearthed,” *Albany Herald*, July 10, 1994; “The Flood of 1994: July 9 - Floating Coffins a Gruesome Sight,” *Albany Herald*, July 7, 2014.

you,” Police Chief Bill Kicklighter said, “please remember they’re trying to save your life. We’ll apologize later.” New problems began to emerge, problems caused not by raging waters, but human beings. Although there was a potent “Kumbaya,” “We’re-all-in-this-together” spirit that drove ordinary Albanians to perform extraordinary feats of selflessness and charity, a darker impulse drove some to theft and mischief. Reports began to surface of boats speeding through waterways packed with loot from abandoned homes. Others—some intentionally, some unintentionally—began trading in gossip, rumors, and miscommunication that caused almost as many problems as the flood itself. Some of the noise bordered on insanity. On Friday afternoon, a man had attached a loudspeaker on top of his truck and drove around “warning residents that a 25-foot tall wall of water was headed their way.” That same night, men pretending to be cops made the rounds at a subdivision, telling folks to leave their homes immediately when no such order had come from the actual police. Idiots took to the sky. Joy riders hoping to catch a bird’s eye view of the destruction below hopped into their private planes and clogged the airways above Albany, making it harder on air traffic controllers and rescue pilots. At the “emergency command center”—little more than a crowded, noisy conference room at the Albany Fire Department—groggy volunteers fielded prank phone calls, up to twenty a day. “Most of our people have gone 40 hours without sleep,” a bleary-eyed Jim Carswell said, “and it makes it all the more difficult having to chase down these bogus calls.” At times, even the police became part of the problem. Like the elementary school game of “telephone,” orders from dispatch were misinterpreted by officers in the field. Instead of warning residents to be prepared for evacuation, some patrolmen actually told them to leave.

Everywhere, it seemed the flood, which had swept through homes and businesses, now began to press on the people themselves. And the Flint River still had not crested.<sup>13</sup>

At 7:15 a.m. on Monday, July 11th, the Flint River mercifully topped out. It had risen nearly 38 feet high and spread as far as three miles from its original banks since the rain began to fall on Independence Day. It had grown, like an insatiable beast, to a level never before seen by the people of Albany. Few in the town were alive to remember the last time the river even sniffed that height. Sixty-nine years earlier, the Flint River Flood of 1925 had driven the waters up to 37.8 feet. A smattering of eerie photographs tucked away in archives testify to the destruction of the old storm, which came before the federal government had equipped itself to deal with such immense disasters: a vacant downtown, partially submerged by a placid ocean of water; a man leaning out of a small wooden boat as he poked his paddle at a stone-faced cow popping its head out of the water, surrounded only by a serene lake ringed by half-naked treetops. No helicopters flew overhead. No emergency command centers were erected. No FEMA disaster money was promised. That inundated world had long since passed and was now being supplanted by the new peak of 1994. But even with the modern resources of the federal government on their side, Albanians would find that reconstructing their lives would be a longer, harder, and

---

<sup>13</sup> John Cheves, "Storm Sewer Backups Cause New Headaches," *Albany Herald*, July 11, 1994; "Volunteers Weathering Swell of Homeless," *Albany Herald*, July 10, 1994; Jackie Ryan, "Skies Flooded with Sightseers," *Albany Herald*, July 10, 1994; Allan Taylor, "Rumors, Miscommunication Causing Almost as Many Problems as Waters," *Albany Herald*, July 10, 1994; "Flood of 1994: July 10 - No Quick Crest for the Flint River," *Albany Herald*, July 8, 2014.

more confusing process than they could have imagined. Although the mighty river had commenced its long-awaited retreat, the worst of the flood was yet to come.<sup>14</sup>

On Tuesday, July 12th, as the river stubbornly receded, as the death toll stopped climbing, as the bullhorns were silenced and mother nature finally raised its white flag, the tired, weather-beaten people of Albany, Georgia received some exciting news: the President was coming tomorrow. Although many welcomed a visit from the commander-in-chief, most of the newly-homeless population of Dougherty County—nearly 23,000 strong—wanted one thing, and one thing only: to go home. Those who’d been thankful to enter the shelters five days earlier when they considered themselves lucky to be alive now chafed against their spartan living conditions. They were tired of sleeping on creaky wooden cots amidst hundreds of strangers in the overcrowded gyms of local high schools. They were tired of the nasty bathrooms, where an open sink was hard to come by, the showers were cold, and you had to avert your eyes constantly to avoid the slew of bodies in various states of undress. They were tired of sweating, tired of parking themselves in front of the one large fan to receive a brief, marginally satisfying respite from the heat. They were tired of the constant tone-deaf chorus of squealing infants that soundtracked their days. The sheltered victims responded as any human being would, with alternating

---

<sup>14</sup> Timothy C. Stamey, “Summary of Data-Collection Activities and Effects of Flooding from Tropical Storm Alberto in Parts of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, July 1994” (Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of the Interior–Georgia Department of Transportation, 1996), 11, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/1996/ofr96-228/pdf/ofr96-228.pdf>; “The Flood of 1994: July 11 - The Flint River Crests in Albany,” *Albany Herald*, July 9, 2014; “Albany, Jan. 1925. The Flint River Overflowed Its Banks and Caused This Flood Damage,” dgh248a-86, Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Archives, University System of Georgia, <http://vault.georgiaarchives.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/vg2/id/5373/rec/2>; “Albany, Jan. 1925. Two Men in a Boat Attempt to Rescue a Cow in High Water. The Flint River Overran Its Banks. :: Vanishing Georgia,” dgh246-86, Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Archives, University System of Georgia, <http://vault.georgiaarchives.org/cdm/ref/collection/vg2/id/5371>.

mixtures of sadness, anger, and resignation. Fifteen-year-old Stacey Brown, who had been at Albany High since Thursday, reflected on her new reality. “I live, I mean I *used* to live, at 608 Jeffries,” she lamented. For others like Gertrude Porter, the shelters had broken them. “I’m dirty. I can’t brush my teeth. I’m out of my blood pressure medicine,” Porter confessed, surrounded by her 44-year-old handicapped daughter and two granddaughters, who looked on as tears streamed down her cheeks. “You just start realizing everything you’ve lost.” Gertrude Porter, Stacey Brown, and the hundreds of other victims began to understand that life wasn’t worth much without a home. It wasn’t that they were deprived of human interaction and community—they had that now in spades, whether they wanted it or not. They longed for their own space again, not only the brick-and-mortar and the furniture and the TV, but the irreplaceable mementos that stood as witnesses to their lives. And they were tired of being coddled, tired of being told how fortunate they were to survive. “Don’t tell me it doesn’t matter,” Gertrude Porter said, “Don’t tell me I’m lucky to be alive.”<sup>15</sup>

As the national politicians arrived, they greeted the Gertrude Porters of Albany with boilerplate condolences and abstract promises that everything would be okay. “We never thought we’d see anything like this,” Georgia Senator Sam Nunn claimed, “and we hope and pray we’ll never see anything like it again.” “This is a very serious disaster,” Bill Clinton admitted, “In a flood like this, the biggest tragedy is always the human

---

<sup>15</sup> “The Flood of 1994: July 12 - Phase 2 of Recovery Begins in Albany,” *Albany Herald*, July 10, 1994; Jenel Williams, “President to View Destruction,” *Albany Herald*, July 13, 1994; Jenel Williams, “Morale Drops Fast at Flood Shelters,” *Albany Herald*, July 13, 1994; Judi Hampton Thompson, “Shelter Living Takes Getting Used To,” *Albany Herald*, July 12, 1994; Judi Hampton Thompson, “Flood Victims Complaining of Poor Treatment,” *Albany Herald*, July 16, 1994; “Helping Carry the Burden,” *Albany Herald*, July 11, 1994.



tragedy.” The President flew around in a helicopter to see the damage and came bearing gifts: \$65.5 million in federal aid—a drop in the bucket. Albany residents gave him a lukewarm reception. At the front lines of the recovery efforts, many greeted the arrival of the President of the United States with sighs rather than applause. For exhausted folks filed into interminable queues at FEMA offices, Bill Clinton’s visit only meant a longer wait for assistance. Meanwhile, local officials proclaimed “Phase Two” of the recovery process had begun, though they admitted it was “crawling” along. The water was now receding at an incremental clip, having dropped two feet and losing one inch per hour. Inspectors had started visiting neighborhoods, trying to clear them for residents to return, but finding that ominous sinkholes had opened up across the city. Every road had to be combed through before drivers could safely pass; until then, the ubiquitous barricades would remain. And if gaping holes in the earth weren’t enough to worry about, officials now had to deal with the stream of complaints coming in about price gouging. Callers had inundated the Better Business Bureau with stories of hotels and grocery stores charging outrageous prices. Then there were the pills: thousands of the homeless had lost their medications, and the Georgia Pharmacy Association’s task force worked overtime to determine who needed what. The Dougherty County Health Department struggled to convince long lines of people that they simply didn’t need a tetanus shot. For poor mothers in the Supplemental Food Program (WIC), they advised breastfeeding in lieu of formula to cut down on the need to sanitize bottles. The amount of human want was staggering, and crises seemed to pop up faster than the hastily constructed task forces could address them.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Jenel Williams, “President to View Destruction”; John Cheves, “Waters Creating

Although a constellation of agencies and charities pitched in, the largest share of work fell to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). When FEMA opened its first temporary office on Monday, July 11th, 1,000 victims lined up to put in their applications. The line stretched far outside the Highland Middle School in east Albany, where the press captured photographs of the applicants, who were unsmiling, concerned, standing patiently under a tin metal awning, and—with few exceptions—overwhelmingly black. Some were accepted, but most members of the crowd were given appointments for a later date. For many applicants, the experience was surreal. “I never had to apply for anything like this before,” said Arthur Lee Wright, a local reverend who’d been washed out of his home. “Never even drawn an unemployment check in my 54 years,” he added, “but I might need one now.” From 8 am to 6 pm, overwhelmed administrators handed out food stamps at a rapid pace. By noon on Tuesday, July 12th, over \$85,000 in emergency food stamps had been issued. By Thursday, July 15th, FEMA was operating three offices in Albany, where exasperated workers explained some hard truths to victims. Of course they tried to play up the good news: most qualified applicants would receive aid in about 10 days. “Aid,” however, could take on many forms. Certain buzzwords were used, like “may be eligible,” and “maximum assistance,” that gave interviewees false hope. If they were uninsured (and most were) and poor enough, they *may be eligible* for grants *up to* \$12,220 (\$20,631 in 2018 dollars), *up to* 18 months of rental payments for temporary housing, *up to* 26 weeks of unemployment checks for those who’d lost jobs because of the flood and didn’t qualify for state benefits, and of course there were loans available.

---

Sinkholes,” *Albany Herald*, July 16, 1994; Mickey Mills, “Health Department Providing Flood Services,” *Albany Herald*, July 15, 1994; “The Flood of 1994: July 13 - President Clinton Tours Albany Disaster Area,” *Albany Herald*, July 11, 2014.

“Low-interest” they were called, with the points ranging from 3.625 to 7.25, *up to* \$200,000 for a primary residence and \$40,000 for personal property. Yes, the amount of *potential* assistance was ample. But the *average* amount of grant money that victims received was nowhere near \$12,220, but less than a third of that, roughly \$4,000. For the jobless and homeless, most of whom had already lived from paycheck-to-paycheck before the flood, they wanted money—not loans—now. A young man trying to apply for unemployment, who asked not to be named, was told he could apply for a loan. “That’s debt,” he responded, “I don’t need any more debt.” And yet the Small Business Administration (SBA) pressed on, telling poor folks how much more money they could get in the form of loans, assuring them they would be repayable. “We tell them that we won’t loan them any more than they can pay back,” SBA officer Ted Thurmond claimed. Most applicants were hesitant. Of the 753 that visited FEMA centers during the first four days, only 122 applied for SBA home loans. But turning in an application was simply the first step through a dense jungle of bureaucratic red tape.<sup>17</sup>

Most who’d applied in-person did so either because they didn’t have working phones (most applicants called the 1-800 number) or they didn’t know they could apply over the phone. They came from the poor black neighborhoods of south and east Albany. Many had walked from the shelters, where they would now return, to wait. That wait would take longer than they expected. Even for those lucky enough to receive good news from FEMA in the form of rental vouchers couldn’t use them—there was nothing to rent. With so many pushed from their homes, demand for apartments shot through the roof.

---

<sup>17</sup> Jenel Williams, “More than 1,000 Flood into FEMA Disaster Relief Office,” *Albany Herald*, July 12, 1994; Barry Levine, “East Albany Gets FEMA Aid Center,” *Albany Herald*, July 13, 1994; Jenel Williams, “FEMA Opens 3rd Aid Center,” *Albany Herald*, July 15, 1994.

Within a matter of days after the river crested, every dry apartment or duplex in the city was occupied. “It’s looking real bad,” said Debi Marsh, President of the Albany Area Apartment Association, “...I think apartments are going to be non-existent for the next six months.” Waiting lists began to materialize at each dry complex, with names stretching into the dozens. And for a good chunk of the evacuees (30 percent lived under the federal poverty line), those waitlisted units were out of their price range. The monthly rent payments, ranging from \$385 to nearly \$700, simply weren’t an option. Hundreds had been swept out of public housing projects, which stood perilously close to the banks of the Flint. “Those were built in the 1950s, when they didn’t have the regulations against building on a flood plain like they do today,” said Dan McCarthy, Executive Director of the Albany Housing Authority. “If they were built today, they probably would not have been built out there.” The 430 residents of the Washington Homes project got it the worst. Their apartments had been completely flooded out, and officials were doubtful that they would ever be able to return home. They also had no idea where to put them. There weren’t enough vacant units in other public housing complexes to accommodate the Washington Homes families, so the Housing Authority instituted a lottery to determine who would get them. After the lottery, 100 families would remain homeless. For them, Dan McCarthy promised a home, though it wouldn’t be in Albany. Instead, they would be able to—voluntarily—“relocate to one of 16 cities in the region surrounding Albany.” And finally, for the last group—those who didn’t qualify for public housing and too poor to afford an apartment—FEMA promised them trailers, “on a case-by-case basis.”<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Wayne Partridge, “Rush for Housing Creates Long Waiting Lists, Frustration,” *Albany Herald*, July 17, 1994.

In the weeks to follow, a common scene played out in the residential neighborhoods of Albany: inspectors walked through waterlogged streets, touring through each house. As they left, they would place one of two stickers on the door: “Do Not Enter” for totaled houses, and “Enter At Your Own Risk” for repairable houses. A house was considered beyond saving “if repair costs would exceed 50 percent of its value.” For many homeowners, that number—50—meant the difference between eventually returning home and living in a trailer with no end in sight. Within a week of the crest, only 5,000 of the 24,000 who’d left their homes during the flood were allowed to return immediately, and most had already done so. The rest constituted a homeless population so large that city leaders harkened back to the Great Depression for ideas. “Tent cities” were proposed, but nobody knew where to put the tents. As they tossed that plan around, 26 mobile homes and 14 travel trailers were already being trucked in from a federal warehouse in Lexington, Kentucky. But no one knew where to put those either. And yet, in the midst of all the destruction and hand-wringing over how to rebuild, some saw opportunity. The Albany NAACP began challenging the city government to see within the wreckage a chance to drastically improve the living conditions for poor and working-class blacks, which had been spiraling downward for years. “The quality of life in these neighborhoods was bad to begin with,” local NAACP President William Wright argued, “and I’d hate to see it get even worse.” The city answered these pleas with a familiar reply: wait. “The flood could lead eventually to urban renewal,” said Assistant City Manager Janice Allen, “but not for a while.”<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> John Cheves, “Up to 7,000 May Stay Homeless,” *Albany Herald*, July 18, 1994.

That answer was insufficient for William Wright, who jumpstarted a new phase of the recovery process, one defined by a mutual distrust between the races, one that would stretch the seams of the city's communal fabric. In a heated County Commission meeting on the night of Monday, July 19th, the local NAACP head and two commissioners squared off in a shouting match that almost ended in a fistfight. It had come at the end of the meeting when Wright rose to impart a message: blacks were getting the short end of the stick. He complained that African Americans were not receiving clean-up contracts and white neighborhoods were being prioritized in the recovery effort. "It's not all it's cracked up to be," Wright said, "people of color were affected (by the flood) disproportionately...our people will be the victims—our quality of life will be worse while a few people will be allowed to reap the benefits." These slights, Wright argued, had their roots planted deep into the city's past. "This is nothing new," he claimed, "my people were already in a disaster before this thing happened. It's called poverty." As Wright left the podium, Commissioner Gil Barrett tried—as well-meaning white politicians had done for years—to say that Wright's struggles were his struggles. Barrett understood his concerns, "but," he argued, "it's not your people, it's our people—we are all in this together." At that point, Wright interrupted Barrett. Fellow commissioner Jack Stone came to his colleague's defense, dressing Wright down for his breach of decorum. That did it. Wright stomped up to the commissioners' table, his hands clenched into tight balls. "You come down here and I'll show you something," he yelled. Then he challenged the rest of the commissioners to "step outside" before audience members wrestled him away. The scene, though heated, did not surprise Juanita Cribb, one of the few black commissioners on the board. For her, the altercation was "just an example of what kind

of emotions have been existing in this community for a long time now, and now they are being brought to the surface through this crisis.” “We can’t afford not to work together,” she pleaded, “If we don’t, this community will tear itself apart worse than any flood ever could.”<sup>20</sup>

While black and white leaders sparred in the halls of government, poor folks continued to suffer. For many, the flood knocked them down the economic ladder they’d struggled so hard to climb up. Those who’d grown up in the slums and clawed their way out to a better life now returned to familiar overpriced, dilapidated shacks, wondering how it all went so wrong. Before the flood, Kay Adams—a thirty-nine-year-old black single mom with two teenagers—had a small but nice enough house on Barton Drive she afforded with the help of state relief agencies. It was no palace, she admitted, but it was safe, and much better than most of the places she had called home in the past. But the flood took it, along with 2,500 other homes that month. Adams had grabbed the kids and fled to a crowded shelter, where they lived for the next two weeks. Finally her escape ticket arrived—a Red Cross rental voucher—a paper check with the alleged power to cover the security deposit and first month’s rent at her new home. That voucher might as well have been a ticket back to the slums. “I called every apartment complex in the phone book,” Adams grumbled, “But just about everyone tells me they’ve got no rooms to rent, they’ve got nothing to rent at all.” The handful of vacant units she found were in northwest Albany, where average rents soared into the \$400 range. But the Red Cross voucher Adams held only worked for the first month, after that she was at the mercy of the federal government. FEMA relief vouchers dangled the potential of stable housing

---

<sup>20</sup> Wayne Partridge, “NAACP Leader Criticizes Relief Efforts,” *Albany Herald*, July 19, 1994.

but no assurance that it would continue from one month to the next. Administrators would only green light one voucher at a time, and held the right to withdraw it whenever they pleased—an arrangement that didn't exactly inspire landlords to approve leases for low-income applicants. "They said I didn't make enough money to rent the apartment if I stopped getting rental vouchers," Adams said, "They turned me down." After striking out on her own, Adams found the B&B Rental Agency, which furnished lists of rental properties to black families. Clutching her new set of leads, Adams visited a set of buildings so heinous that she concluded it was better to return to the shelter. The "houses" were nothing more than a collection of crumbling wooden hovels. "I wouldn't send a dog in here," Adams declared while peering out the rickety front door at 522 ½ Cotton Avenue. The shack rented at \$155 a month and required a \$100 "damage deposit." They should have paid residents to live there. Walking through, Adams spotted piles of human feces, broken and boarded-up windows, graffiti-covered walls and sets of naked pipes where bathroom fixtures once stood. And yet, it was the best thing available. "This is the only kind of place that's left for poor flood victims now," claimed Eddie Moore, a friend who'd volunteered to help Adams find a home. "These people might be poor," he added, "but they're still human beings. They deserve better than this."<sup>21</sup>

So Kay Adams returned to the shelter, resigned to the fact that her family would remain there for the time being. She made the right call. Many families, desperate for some semblance of a home, swallowed their pride and handed their vouchers over to the slumlords. Next door to the nightmarish house Adams had just toured, Fred Walker was moving his girlfriend, their four children and some furniture into another rundown

---

<sup>21</sup> John Cheves, "Slums Pull Back Families Who Scraped to Get Out," *Albany Herald*, July 25, 1994.



hellhole. He admitted the house was a dump, but the family just couldn't stomach another night in a shelter. "Unfortunately, when you don't have nowhere to go, you've got to go where you can," Walker confessed, dragging his young son off the dilapidated front porch. He had given the B&B Rental Agency \$255 for the privilege of living in squalor. Barbara Bell, the agency's owner, denied responsibility. "It's not that we're trying to push off substandard housing on people," Bell protested, claiming the property owners wouldn't allow them to perform any repairs. She refused to identify who owned the houses. As Fred Walker explained his plight, a man from the Water, Gas & Light Department told him there was no way he could restore electricity until the mishmash of bad wiring that festooned the house was repaired. That wasn't going to happen today, and tomorrow was Saturday. The family of six would spend their weekend in darkness.<sup>22</sup>

At least Fred Walker had some living space, disgusting though it was. For the Dawson family, the term "close-knit" had taken on a whole new meaning. Since July 10, fourteen relatives had shared Andrea Dawson's modest one-bedroom apartment. Twelve had already carved out their spaces on the floor, and another nine relatives—whose Red Cross housing vouchers ran out that afternoon—would soon join them. The mental toll was overwhelming at times. "When it gets too bad I go for a walk or sit outside," twenty-five-year-old Annette Dawson confessed. Like Kay Adams, like Fred Walker, Annette and her family had checks from FEMA, but nowhere to spend them. "I've gone through every apartment complex and realtor in the phone book," Annette said. "I don't have any kids. It's just me and my boyfriend. We both have jobs, but they all say there is nothing available." The family tried to maximize its time by dividing into groups to search for

---

<sup>22</sup> "Slums Pull Back Families".

housing. “My mom goes with my aunts,” Annette explained, “I go with my boyfriend and my sister goes with hers. We all come up empty.” Together, they had visited nearly 100 rental agents so far. “I called so many places I can’t even remember their names,” Annette said. She had walked through Lennox Oaks Apartments and spied several empty units, but the manager claimed none were available. “She wouldn’t even tell me what the rent was,” Annette claimed, “One lady said she had one coming up in August and she could put me on a waiting list with 15 other people.” As Annette spoke, her diabetic mother Ruth was preparing—not by choice—to move out of the Heritage House Hotel along with her boyfriend, her two sisters and their boyfriends, a four-year-old nephew and two mentally challenged teenagers. At Heritage House, they’d taken the mattresses off their frames and splayed them out on the floor so everyone could have a place to sleep, and even then some of the kids had to go stay with friends. “It’s hard to sleep on box springs,” Ruth said. Before they found the hotel, the family bounced around a few shelters. “We tried to stay in the shelter,” Ruth said, “but we had to sleep on the floor and all those kids were so bad. They were horrible, they would just run all over you.” Like her daughter, Ruth had spent her days on the phone, looking for someone, anyone, to take her voucher. “The only things available are for sale,” she claimed, “I asked the realtors please if they would just let us rent one that’s for sale, just for a little while, and they said no.” Even the simple act of calling rental agencies had taken its toll. Ruth had given nearly all her money to the Heritage House, which charged 50 cents a call. And her problems stretched beyond the search for housing. Ruth’s elderly mother, who’d suffered a stroke during the flood, was close to being released from the hospital. “She wants to come home,” Ruth said, “but we don’t have a place for her to go. A social worker

arranged for a special care place to take her. They said it costs more than her Social Security check, but they would take her anyway. I can't help pay it. FEMA gave me \$300 for my first month's rent, but I don't have anything for a deposit."<sup>23</sup>

While low-income families ricocheted through a dreadful market, FEMA mobile homes began trickling into Albany. Original estimates called for 99 trailers, the first of which rumbled into town on Wednesday, July 20. The main beneficiaries of the temporary housing boom were not its future residents, but business owners. FEMA hired Albany-based Southern Mobile Home Parts & Transport to haul and install the first five trailers, and Imperial Mobile Village leased out the spaces. Imperial gladly rented out 57 more sites. When asked about costs, FEMA public affairs officer Joy McIlwain couldn't provide any numbers or even ballpark guesses as to how much the agency had paid the two companies. No one at Imperial Mobile Village was around to say how much they'd received, and Wayne Johnson, owner of Southern Mobile Home, said his company was just one of many doing the transport work. He refused to say how much he was getting for the job. Over the coming weeks, every spare trailer lot in every park in Albany It was a good time to be in the mobile home business.<sup>24</sup>

Trucking the trailers in was the easy part, figuring out where to put them proved to be more of a challenge. As their meeting began on the night of Tuesday, July 26, Albany City Commissioners tried to ignore the critical faces of disgruntled residents while they proposed four new trailer sites: two industrial parks and two plots of privately owned land. One of the parcels—a 100-lot spread owned by the Norfolk Southern

---

<sup>23</sup> Jenel Williams, "Rental Dearth Leads to Crowded Living," *Albany Herald*, July 25, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Wayne Partridge, "Emergency Mobile Homes Begin Arriving in Albany," *Albany Herald*, July 21, 1994.

Railroad—brought a stream of complaints, even from African American residents, who saw the incoming flux of low-income homeless tenants as a threat to their safety and property values. “We have a good neighborhood,” said Alvin Barrett of Country Club Estates, “and we don’t want vandalism and theft. They’re (homeless flood victims) coming out of high-crime areas, and we don’t want it in our area.” “You can say it’s only going to be temporary,” he added, “but we’re concerned it’s going to be permanent.” Hazel Hinton, also of Country Club Estates, “asked why northwest Albany is not represented in this, as it seems as if all the people are being stuck in the black areas.” Although City Manager Roy Lane listed off a slew of infrastructural deficiencies at alternate sites, the main reason why white neighborhoods were spared was simple: African Americans had taken the brunt of the storm. “When you look at the number of housing units that were impacted,” Lane reported, “the large number of units, particularly rental, are in the South Central area, and there was a desire to place some mobile homes in an area that would be as close to their neighborhoods as possible.”<sup>25</sup>

That conclusion wasn’t necessarily off base. When it came time to rebuild what was lost, most folks just wanted their homes resurrected on the same lots they’d occupied before the flood. Standing in the way of that goal, however, were regulations. FEMA guidelines—one in particular known as the “Substantial Damage Clause”—dictated that any building where damage amounted to 50 percent of its appraised value had to be rebuilt to meet certain standards laid down in the 1970s. Any house reconstructed in the 100-year

---

<sup>25</sup> Heather Sumner, “City Selects Sites for Trailers,” *Albany Herald*, July 27, 1994; “Regular Meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the City of Albany, Georgia,” July 26, 1994, [https://library.municode.com/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic\\_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141994\\_07\\_26PDF](https://library.municode.com/ga/albany/munidocs/electronic_minutes?nodeId=M7RMOTBOC46141994_07_26PDF).

floodplain had to be elevated at least one foot—a requirement that skyrocketed costs, in many cases beyond the building’s original value. And so again, the number 50 became paramount to Albany homeowners. But it seemed everyone was confused about how that 50 percent was calculated, so they went to their city officials and asked.<sup>26</sup>

While they ran through their morning work session on Tuesday, August 2, Albany’s city commissioners were confronted by a surge of questions from residents about the intricacies of the 50 percent rule. They had no idea what to say. Instead of providing answers, the City Commission and FEMA started a game of “hot potato.” After sending away the residents, city officials supplicated themselves before FEMA administrators at their afternoon meeting. “These people are coming to us, and we don’t know what to tell them,” commissioner George Ort said. But the bureaucrats were just as clueless, so they punted to Albany-Dougherty Planning Director Jim Tolbert, supposedly the man in charge of enforcing the rule. “Mr. Tolbert knows how to do this, and it’s up to the community to trust him. We trust him,” said FEMA official Katie Hayden. Mr. Tolbert didn’t know how to do this. At the morning work session, he had already tried and failed to tease out the byzantine statute for concerned residents. In his “informational report,” Tolbert had explained that the rule pertained to houses with repair costs totaling 50 percent of their market value. At that point, Commissioner Doug Everett piped in, claiming he had been told by FEMA that the 50 percent applied to the market value of the property loss, not repair costs. In other words, what mattered was not how much it cost to fix up your home, but how much of your home—the carpets, drapes, furniture, electronics and everything in between—that the flood destroyed. That debate led residents and the

---

<sup>26</sup> Heather Sumner, “FEMA Rules Confuse Some Flood Victims,” *Albany Herald*, August 1, 1994.

commission down a new rabbit hole of legalistic inquiry. “It was still unclear,” according to City Manager Roy Lane, “whether 20-year-old carpet, for instance, would be itemized by its replacement cost or its market value.” No consensus was reached that day.

Residents threw their hands up in exasperation. “This commission should be responsible,” Charles Harpe complained, “We go to these meetings and we come away confused.” Flood victim James Leroy couldn’t contain his sarcasm, telling the commission it was “a little embarrassing for people who are supposed to be as smart as you all are.” Reverend Samuel Wells, a black minister and Albany Movement veteran, chastised the city for ceding its responsibility to Washington. “You’re sitting around this table and don’t know anything about 30 cents of that \$65 million President Clinton promised.” “We are looking to the elected officials to protect this city,” he added, “and I don’t think y’all should be coming up on the tail end like this.”<sup>27</sup>

Confusion reigned over the next few days while city, county, state, and federal officials all got on the same page. Outside of the 50 percent debacle, residents had come to expect more than the government would provide. But FEMA also helped construct the mirage of funding when one of their officials, Richard Krimm, appeared on the local news and misled viewers into thinking abundant sums of money would soon roll in. But that money—\$50 million dollars—was not going to help them directly. It was simply a block grant of “hazard mitigation funds” that the state’s 53 flood-affected counties would compete for. Still, many victims struggled to understand or accept that they—not the government—would be footing most of the bill. “They look at their house and they consider it totally destroyed and they are getting a check for \$6,500 and their first

---

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

response is, ‘This is not going to cover all my damage,’” Albany Assistant Manager Janice Allen explained. Allen continued with a lecture from Disaster Relief 101, noting that “the government’s responsibility is to make the home safe, sanitary and secure, not to put it back the way it was.” If they wanted more than they received in grants, Allen invited them to put in a loan application at the local SBA office. And so, over the course of six public meetings during the first week of August, administrators from all strata of government clinically deflated the hopes and expectations of the dispossessed. This re-education campaign—targeted at a primarily low-income black audience—only intensified the growing sense among many in the black community that their government did not care about them. That crystallizing frustration expanded the void between white and black in Albany. Into that vacuum stepped a smooth-talking outsider, a man of national prominence armed with a shocking new theory. In his story, the poor black residents of Albany had been disproportionately flooded not by Mother Nature, but by white city officials who had deliberately sacrificed their homes.<sup>28</sup>

The headline came over the AP wire on August 3: “Jesse Jackson drops a bombshell.” It came during a rambling oration—part sermon, part stump speech—in front of 200 black parishioners at the Friendship Missionary Baptist Church. Clad in a dark blue suit, Jackson spoke from the pulpit in his trademark staccato fashion, his voice a symphony that rose and fell like a seismograph while audience members punctuated his lines with heartfelt affirmations: “yeah!” “say it!” and “all right.” He spoke of God’s fairness, reminding the black community that over the long sweep of history, the Lord’s balance sheet always evened out. “When these natural disasters occur,” Jackson claimed,

---

<sup>28</sup> Heather Sumner; Mark Bondurant, “Meetings to Answer Questions,” *Albany Herald*, August 1, 1994.

“...God has a way of leveling the playing field.” He spoke of economics, urging city officials to establish a job center “to train these young men and young women that they might be able to lay bricks and not throw them.” He spoke of FEMA, criticizing its unnecessary red tape. “People should get help because they need help,” Jackson declared, bringing forth a wave of applause. “Some people can’t read or write. People got flooded here just because they got flooded. You don’t have to sign papers to get flooded. You don’t have to read and write to get flooded.” And then, tucked into the middle of his speech as if it were just another extemporaneous thought, came the bombshell: “there’s a real question raised today as I visited some communities about fairness in the flood...some testimony about water being pumped from the rich areas to the poor areas.” Jackson translated that indignation into calls for action. First he demanded there be an investigation, then he spoke directly to the young adults in the crowd, asking those over 18 who hadn’t registered to vote to come up front, sign their names, and promise to exercise their political rights. “We’ve marched too long,” Jackson preached, “and we’ve bled too much and we’ve died too young to do less than the best.” Finally the stemwinder drew to a close, and Jackson ended as he began by leading the people in a communal mantra: “We have a faith stronger than the floods. I am somebody. I am God’s child. God will see us through. Keep hope alive.” With that, Jackson made his exit, leaving for another tour of the flooded neighborhoods. As the crowd dissolved, a few dozen people who subscribed to Jackson’s theory about the pumping of floodwaters into black neighborhoods filed into a small back room where they signed their names, addresses, and phone numbers.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Mark Bondurant, “Jackson Lifts Spirits during Church Talk,” *Albany Herald*, August



Although Jesse Jackson trained a larger spotlight on the floodwater diversion theory, he hadn't created it. Rumors of the scandal had reverberated throughout the poor black neighborhoods of south Albany for weeks. The most visible proponent of the idea was Mary Young-Cummings, a giant within the black community whose activist bonafides were beyond reproach. She had grown up in the little south-central Georgia town of Fitzgerald, where she came of age as a foot soldier in the civil rights movement by conducting sit-ins at hometown lunch counters, restaurants, and movie theaters. She made her way to Savannah State College where she established an NAACP Youth Council. She bounced around the South, working on civil rights campaigns in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. When Martin Luther King, Jr. proclaimed "I Have A Dream," she was there. She attended law school at the top destination for would-be black lawyers, Howard University. After a brief stint with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in New York City, she ended up in southwest Georgia, where she worked with local attorney and civil rights icon C.B. King. She became a top-notch lawyer, and in 1975 she cemented her legacy by spearheading *Paige v. Gray*, the suit that finally cracked the discriminatory at-large voting system that had stymied black political progress even after the Voting Rights Act of 1965. That same year she became one of the first two black city commissioners in Albany's history. From 1983 to 1992, she served in the Georgia General Assembly. In 1988 she became chair of the Georgia Association of Black Elected Officials, over the objections of many colleagues who saw her gender as a disqualification. She was a dogged, committed, tireless defender of those in need. And now she stood, a stout black

woman of 50, telling her former constituents they'd been hoodwinked by their own representatives.<sup>30</sup>

The story went as follows: on July Fourth, as Tropical Depression Alberto began unloading on southwest Georgia, officials from the Georgia Power Company nervously eyed Lake Worth, a small reservoir a few miles north of downtown Albany that stood at the confluence of two crucial fail safes: the Flint River Dam and the Muckafoonee Creek spillway, two major escape valves for the Flint located on the southern end of the lake. by As the rains of July Fourth coagulated north of Albany, they began trickling into Lake Worth, threatening to overwhelm its dam. At that point, Georgia Power engineers discussed opening floodgates on the Muckafoonee Creek spillway and the Flint River dam. The idea was straightforward enough: by dropping the level of Lake Worth, they would be able to handle the new floodwaters about to rush in from the north. Their intentions, they claimed, were pure, and scientifically sound. "There is no way our intent would be to flood downstream," Georgia Power spokesman Rick Kimble protested, "even if we knew a large flood was on the way...We felt like we were doing it in a way that was no sort of hazard downstream at all." The Flint River disagreed.<sup>31</sup>

On July Fourth, Georgia Power officials opened the first gate on the Muckafoonee spillway. The next day they opened the remaining five, as well as seven gates on the Flint River Dam. On July 6, all 16 gates at the dam were opened. At the same time, from the morning of July 5 to July 6, Sumter County, located just north of Albany, was shellacked by over 20 inches of rain, and that water—now freed by the

---

<sup>30</sup> Rick Badie, "Mary Moss Young-Cummings, 66: Former State Representative," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 19, 2010; Terry Lewis, "Young-Cummings Papers Donated to Howard," *Albany Herald*, April 8, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Wayne Partridge, "Officials Defend Flood Response," *Albany Herald*, August 4, 1994.

opening of the Muckafoonee spillway—headed straight for Lake Worth. As morning came on July 7, the areas south of the spillway and dam were overwhelmed. Water began cascading over the series of levees that lined the banks of the Flint and flowed straight into manholes and catch basins. This proved catastrophic for the older sections of town—particularly low-lying south Albany—where the storm water and sewage systems were combined. Everyone in south Albany had to immediately evacuate, including Mary Young-Cummings, who now led a group of 100 people calling themselves the “South Albany Mega Flood Task Force.” They felt as though they’d been victimized, and made it their mission to find out the truth.<sup>32</sup>

The response was predictable: blanket denials, strongly worded denunciations, and commentaries that took on a new level of acidity, particularly toward Jesse Jackson. “I certainly feel like it was an irresponsible statement by a national figure like he (Jackson) is,” County Commissioner Gil Barrett said, “To come in unknowing and make such a statement such as he did without any substantiation...some of it was so ridiculous.” Assistant City Manager Janice Allen noted that 40 percent of flood victims were white. Albany Mayor Paul Keenan dismissed the theory outright. “They are mistaken,” he said, “I’m completely certain that no one in city government would undertake to divert water on any particular part of town. I very much doubt that that’s feasible and it may be impossible.” Finally, Bruce Maples, Albany’s acting city engineer, took to the press and went line by line through questions posed by the Mega Flood Task Force:

- Were floodwaters manipulated to protect some Albany neighborhoods at the expense of south Albany?

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

- No. Flooding naturally occurred in lower-lying areas below the river, nothing could've been done to stop that. "Topography determined where the floodwaters went," Maples added, "not socio-economic concerns."
- Were floodgates along the Muckafoonee Creek opened, and if so, why and by whom?
  - Yes, by Georgia Power, and if they hadn't done so, Maples claimed, "the water level probably would have crested a foot higher, worsening flooding throughout the city."
- Were other flood control devices used to direct water away from some neighborhoods into others?
  - Yes, but the only pumping done was from the neighborhood surrounding the Palmyra Medical Center to a stormwater system west of Dawson Road, away from south Albany. Trying to pump water out of south Albany was impossible because of the distance: that water would have to travel over a mile before it hit a ridge that would effectively carry it away.
- Is the drainage system designed to give less protection to minority and poor neighborhoods?
  - No. The stormwater system—a patchwork of pipes running throughout the city—was designed to move rain out of Albany, not redirect it to certain neighborhoods. "We have not designed anything to adversely affect any portion of the community,"

Maples explained, adding that, “We know we have areas that need some improvement but it is not designed to flood out anybody intentionally.”<sup>33</sup>

For most Albanians, black and white, that settled the issue. Jackson and Young-Cummings traveled out to D.C. and met with officials, even got the Department of Justice to open an investigation. Nothing ever came of it. But for a brief moment, white Albanians were forced to acknowledge the complaints of the black community, if only to dismiss them outright. Most responded with the same talking points: we all suffered and it's no one's fault. William Gardner, a local school superintendent, bemoaned the new divisive rhetoric, seeing it as a marked break from the harmonious cooperation between the two communities during the flood. “What I saw was people of all races working together,” noting that it was “truly regrettable that some people attempt to make a racial issue out of a flood when it could and should be used to bring this city together.” Lee Formwalt, an Albany State professor and as progressive a white liberal that ever lived in Albany, was dismayed by the accusations. “I’ve always seen racism as a problem in this city,” he allowed, “but cooperation between the races was brought on by the flood.” He understood how valid frustrations had given birth to the theory but, he added, “People in public office like Jackson have to be careful about what they say. They can really tear the community apart.” More critical editorials poured in: “Jackson, Young-Cummings destroy community's unity;” “Jesse Jackson's comments were salt in city's wounds;”

---

<sup>33</sup> Partridge, “Officials defend flood response”; Mark Bondurant, “Georgia Power Officials Defend Decision to Open Dams,” *Albany Herald*, August 5, 1994.

“Ridiculous charges only add to flood suffering;” “Flood allegations are insult to those who helped city;” and, “Where was Jesse Jackson when we needed help?”<sup>34</sup>

It wasn't just white folks who were upset with Jesse Jackson. The controversy divided the black community as well. “I just hope and pray one day we can live together without blaming white people for everything,” said James Bush, chairman of the Dougherty County Democratic Party, “...It was an act of God. Aren't we polarized enough without all of that?” Assistant County Administrator Morris Williams, like many of his peers in the black community, laid claim to the middle ground, disowning Jackson's theory but not its foundation. “I don't think he was placing blame,” Williams said, “just questioning the problem. That's an American right.” Even members of the Friendship Baptist Church where Jackson first presented the theory had their doubts. S.M. Mosely, a 79-year-old pastor who remembered the 1925 flood, disagreed with Jackson and Youngs-Cummings. “The dam was not purposely turned on to flood south Albany,” he said, noting that the '25 flood had followed the exact same route as '94. “In 1925,” he said, “there was not any housing subdivisions there, just woods, and it got flooded then.” As to why Jackson and Young-Cummings would perpetuate such a story, Mosely saw nothing but naked political ambition. “Jesse Jackson's just rabble-rousing, stirring things up, trying to raise money,” he said, while Young-Cummings “has been political down and she's trying to build her political base back up.” For Brady Keys, Jr., a former NFL All-Pro defensive back turned entrepreneur, the issue wasn't being framed

---

<sup>34</sup> Jenel Williams, “Locals Respond to Jackson's Flood Charges,” *Albany Herald*, August 5, 1994; Rev. Keith Travis, “Jesse Jackson's Comments Were Salt in City's Wounds,” *Albany Herald*, August 5, 1994; Ronnie Farr, “Jackson, Young-Cummings Destroy Community's Unity,” *Albany Herald*, August 5, 1994; “The People's Forum,” *Albany Herald*, August 7, 1994; Mary Y. Herndon, “Where Was Jesse Jackson When We Needed Help?,” *Albany Herald*, August 8, 1994.

properly. He accepted Georgia Power's denials, but pointed to the larger issue lying underneath. "The issue," he claimed, "is the discrimination in the whole flood process. Blacks are not being treated fair. It's not the water, it's the treatment of the people." Keys pointed to the numerous calls he had received at his radio station, WJIZ, from black callers saying their FEMA checks were much lower than those received by whites. He also told of his off-the-record conversations with black FEMA officials who described the relief process as racially biased. In the wake of the PR storm that had erupted, the rhetoric—even from those most closely associated with the theory—smoothed out. No one, it seemed, was willing to flat-out accuse the city of wrongdoing anymore, only to suggest there be an investigation. Even William Wright—he of the "come down here and I'll show you something" incident—only dabbled in speculation. "If their assertions are so ridiculous," he said, "then they should be easy to disprove." The sooner the matter could be laid to rest, the better. In the near future, however, Jesse Jackson had no intention of letting the issue die.<sup>35</sup>

Although Jackson left shortly after his whirlwind tour through Albany, he promised to return to recreate a scene from the 1960s: a mass march. "We intend to have a hearing on the 20th," Jackson said, "and we expect to have a join mass meeting and demonstration on that Sunday (the 21st)—from the gates that were opened to the flooding site." Jackson's announcement precipitated a small feeding frenzy for national black leaders. Following Jackson's visit, NAACP Executive Director Benjamin Chavis came to town, making similar tours through south Albany before attending a county commission meeting to pitch a joint flood relief partnership aimed at the black neighborhoods.

---

<sup>35</sup> Jenel Williams, "Locals Respond to Jackson's Flood Charges"; "Former Albany Businessman Brady Keys Jr. Dies at Age 81," *Albany Herald*, October 26, 2017.

Jackson and Chavis had a history: the year before, Chavis had beaten out the Rainbow Coalition leader for the NAACP's top post. And now he came in hot, armed with pointed questions: "How many people have been displaced?"; "What are the racial breakdowns and what are the quantifications of damage?" Commissioner Doug Everett stormed out. "We came down here for unity," he said, "and the very next thing, 'How many were white and how many were black?' What difference does it make? Albanians were affected." Everett couldn't dislodge Chavis, who promised the NAACP would create a "permanent" presence in the area. Although it wouldn't prove to be "permanent," over the next few months the national NAACP focused intently on southwest Georgia. The last time NAACP outsiders paid this much attention had been in 1961 when they tried to take over the newborn Albany Movement.<sup>36</sup>

Despite their efforts, the NAACP's involvement didn't make much of a splash at the moment; it was still Jesse Jackson's show. On Monday, August 16, local black ministers advertised the upcoming weekend visit of "our brother the Rev. Jesse Jackson," who would lead his promised parade and "fact-finding" hearing. Time had not forced Jackson or Young-Cummings to moderate their opinions. They still wanted answers. "Our neighborhood is silent and it's smelly and it's destroyed," Young-Cummings said, "and we want to know if what was done was appropriate. If there was a legitimate answer, it seems like it would have been given by now." The city had given all the answers it had, and Jackson knew he had no great reveal up his sleeve, no smoking gun to present to his audience that would confirm their worst suspicions. What he had was his

---

<sup>36</sup> Philip Lucas, "Jackson Seeks Federal Probe on Floodwaters," *Albany Herald*, August 6, 1994; Todd Douglas, "NAACP Leader Tours Albany," *Albany Herald*, August 7, 1994.



name, his prestige, an ability to whip up a crowd, and a righteous sense of moral indignation absorbed from the neglected black people of Albany, Georgia. He would put all those things to good use on Saturday.<sup>37</sup>

At 1 p.m. on Saturday, August 21, 1994, Jesse Jackson emerged from a small private plane at the Southwest Georgia Regional Airport. One hour later he was standing in front of a crowd of 300 at the Ritz Cultural Center in downtown Albany. “We didn’t come here looking to find this issue of fairness with the flood,” Jackson preached, “These concerns were brought to us by people who live in Albany, people who were experiencing a disaster before there was ever any water.” Then he handed over the microphone to the black residents of Albany, who let it all out. Tales of every conceivable hardship—previously just chatter between friends and family—were transformed by the microphone into forceful public testimonies. They complained about FEMA, complained about private relief efforts, told stories of getting utility bills while their homes sat underwater, and criticized the city for sandbagging the Albany Civic Center while ignoring Albany State’s campus. Jackson acknowledged the elasticity of these accounts, but that didn’t mean they lacked merit. “People’s perceptions are reality to them,” he said, “...these are your neighbors, these are people who live right here in Albany. This is not something Jesse...thought up.”

As the meeting drew to a close, Jackson took to the streets. Dressed in an all-black leisure suit, he held hands with two small boys, one on his left, one on his right.

---

<sup>37</sup> Heather Sumner, “Jesse Jackson to Preside over Parade, Flood Hearing,” *Albany Herald*, August 16, 1994; Wayne Partridge, “City Approves Jackson March Permit,” *Albany Herald*, August 18, 1994; Wayne Partridge, “Jackson ‘greasing machinery’ before Albany Visit Saturday,” *Albany Herald*, August 17, 1994; Mickey Mills, “Jesse Jackson to Lead March in Flood Areas,” *Albany Herald*, August 20, 1994.

Next to them stood Mary Young-Cummings, wearing a mint green African dashiki. Behind them were 200 black men, women, and children. They chanted in unison. They sang “Come by here, my Lord.” They clutched signs that read “Fairness in Flood Relief,” “Heal and Rebuild,” “Keep Hope Alive,” and “Let Justice Roll Down Like Water.” The route was carefully laid out and adhered to: south on Jackson Street, west on Cotton Avenue, then south onto Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard. As they traversed their battered neighborhoods, marchers carefully navigated down roads littered with broken glass. They looked to their right and left and saw rows of boarded-up houses. They breathed in the nauseating aroma—a potpourri of waterlogged furniture and mildewed clothes. Finally the caravan stopped at an iron gate. Some marchers began to cry. This was the entrance to Riverside Cemetery, one of South Albany's two main resting grounds for the city's black descendants. As Jackson placed a white heart-shaped wreath on the cemetery gate, thirteen-year-old Princess Woodall burst into tears. She was not crying because she had lost a home or a car or a TV or a piece of furniture. Her tears were for her father, Bennie Woodall. He died in 1987. His body, along with over 400 others, had been unearched by the flood.<sup>38</sup>

The march was supposed to end at the Mount Zion Baptist Church, the incubator for the Albany Movement, the site where Martin Luther King had made his first speech back in December 1961. But Jackson was already late for his next speech—an advertised “unity” rally at the Albany Municipal Auditorium. As they walked back toward the Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School, Jackson listened to several marchers' concerns. A five-car motorcade soon materialized, and Jackson hopped into a white van

---

<sup>38</sup> Wayne Partridge, “Jackson Defends Comments,” *Albany Herald*, August 21, 1994; Coretta Gooden, “200 Join in March for Justice,” *Albany Herald*, August 21, 1994.

and sped off into the distance. His last major speech in Albany was not that major. He entered the auditorium to find about 100 people who'd been waiting over two hours for him to arrive. The speech he delivered had substance. This, he told the black community, was a moment of opportunity. "The flood will attract capital," he said. "You're going to need sewers and piping and brick mansions and job training and all new possibilities." Rebuilding would provide a chance "to be self-sufficient," to learn a trade, to get a job, to get not just money, but *capital*. Without control over capital, racial equality would continue to elude Albany. "As long as whites are the host and blacks are the parasite, there will never be a sense of equality," Jackson said. "Once we're co-hosts, then there will be a sense of equality."<sup>39</sup>

The rest of his trip played out with less fanfare. After his last speech, he went to the offices of the *Herald* where he dished out a stern rebuke for their editorial choices. He dined—in private—with a group of black ministers that night. Sunday morning he was up early, making the circuit tour of local church services—Thankful Baptist at 9 a.m., Friendship Baptist at 11 a.m., lunch in Americus, New Hope Church at 3 p.m., and then back to the airport, where he hopped back into his private jet and took off into the northern skies. He would never again—in any substantive way—play a role in Albany's history. Like his friend Martin Luther King 32 years earlier, Jackson departed southwest Georgia, leaving only well wishes and a vision of black uplift. Responsibility for

---

<sup>39</sup> Coretta Gooden, "200 Join in March for Justice," *Albany Herald*, August 21, 1994; Todd Douglas, "Jackson Encourages Better Race Relations in Rebuilding," *Albany Herald*, August 21, 1994.

fulfilling that vision would fall to the black men and women of Albany, just as it always had.<sup>40</sup>

As Jackson's plane climbed into the stratosphere, 500 families were still waiting to hear back from FEMA. They'd applied for temporary housing, hoping to move into a federally-sanctioned trailer home. From their office at Albany Towers, FEMA representatives worked the phones around the clock, placing call after call to waiting list families, asking them the same questions: "Have you found permanent housing?"; "How many are in your household?"; "Which park would you like to live in?" To the last question, they usually answered: "anywhere." "Most people were just thrilled that we have something," said FEMA worker Suzy Honeywell. "Most of them are saying, 'We'll take anything at this point.'"<sup>41</sup>

Many who had found some form of housing still had nothing to do with their time. The storm had crippled the local job market, doubling the unemployment rate from a pre-flood mark of 8.5 percent to a staggering 17.7 percent. It had all happened so quickly too—within a matter of days, paper signs began popping up in storefront windows all across town, bearing handwritten announcements: "Closed Due To Flood Damage." Within a matter of days, former employees began to feel the pain of that missing paycheck. "I used to have money for little extras for my grandchildren," Thelma Albritton said as she stood outside the permanently shuttered Kmart where she used to work. It wasn't just the paycheck they missed, but the sense that they were somehow

---

<sup>40</sup> Mickey Mills, "Jesse Jackson to Lead March in Flood Areas," *Albany Herald*, August 20, 1994.

<sup>41</sup> Heather Sumner, "Families Await 500 More FEMA Mobile Homes," *Albany Herald*, August 23, 1994.

contributing. “It was very frustrating,” said Edythe Bradley, a public affairs specialist at Albany State College, “I wanted to do something, even if only mop and sweep.”<sup>42</sup>

While the jobless searched for work and the homeless waited for trailers, bureaucrats dithered over where to put the mobile homes. It seemed no one wanted them. When a vote to add 100 new pads to the Pecan Grove Industrial Park came before the Albany-Dougherty Payroll Development Authority, three of the five board members sunk the petition. Commissioner Gil Barrett, agribusinessman Hank Goodyear, and bank executive Doug Wren felt the additional trailers (there were already 100 on the current site) would scare away potential business investment. The two dissenting board members branded their colleagues as insensitive and cold. Barrett responded that they had already “shown compassion in allowing the first 100.” Yes, there was a duty to find these people homes, but business won out. “We also have an obligation to find employment for these people,” Barrett replied, “and what industry wants to come in next to a trailer park?” Even if it had passed, the measure would have only made a small dent in the shortage—950 pads were still needed, and FEMA was still getting 100 housing assistance applications every day.<sup>43</sup>

The hiccups continued well into 1995, always following a similar pattern: the city proposed a site, nearby residents frothed at the mouth, and poor folks waited. And waited. Eventually they got the call and moved into barebones travel trailers and mobile homes plopped onto empty swaths of grassland where improvised communities arose. Reactions to the new living conditions were mixed. Families that moved into larger mobile homes

---

<sup>42</sup> Coretta Gooden, “Jobless Rate Doubled by July Flood,” *Albany Herald*, August 26, 1994.

<sup>43</sup> Heather Sumner, “Industrial Park Won’t Add Trailers,” *Albany Herald*, September 8, 1994.

were happy, while individuals and couples relegated to smaller travel trailers were miserable. The travel trailers were little more than oversized closets, usually one-bedroom units with 240 square feet. Everyone wanted to move out, but of the 953 families stuck in travel trailers, only 75 were invited to move into mobile homes. The news hit hard. “I don’t want to be out here that long—sure enough when it starts to getting cold,” said Elza Brown, who lived in a travel trailer at the Chehaw Wild Animal Park. “They told me I was getting a mobile home before too long. Ain’t no one told me different.” Brown’s neighbors were just as upset. “No, no, no. Lord, no, I can’t be out here no year and a half,” 43-year-old Shirley Wade said. “I got a boy 13 years old I got to keep.” Those lucky enough to move into a mobile home—typically three-bed, one-bath, furnished FEMA trailers recycled from their use by previous disaster survivors—were overjoyed. James Williams, a 64-year-old retired construction worker with a bad heart, might as well have won the lottery. In September, 1994, Williams and his wife Leslie joined fifteen other families on a new plot of land on Mobile Avenue. On a rainy Saturday, the couple decompressed on the couch, celebrating Williams’s birthday while watching a football game. And it was great. “I’ve been staying with a daughter and (James) was with his sister-in-law, so we’ve been separated for the last three months,” Leslie said, “This is just the best thing.” “Yes, sir. Yes, sir,” James added. Across town, Maebell Baldwin settled into a mobile home at another recently opened park. It was a bit cramped, but she welcomed the change. “It feels good,” she said as her husband and two boys carried in their belongings. “Do you know where I can buy a fan?”<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Jeff Graves, “Mr. Williams Gets a Gift,” *Albany Herald*, September 22, 1994; Mark Bondurant, “Temporary but Welcome Homes,” *Albany Herald*, September 26, 1994.

Where incoming residents saw hope, existing homeowners saw crime and blight. “We’re getting a bad deal,” said Ron Tate, chairman of a local neighborhood watch group. “I agree that these people need somewhere to stay,” he added, “but there are many who are just taking advantage of the system. I’m talking about these low-income people who ride the streets all night and go through our houses when we’re at work.” Benny Williams, the group’s vice-chairman, agreed, listing “vandalism, burglary, assault, rape and murder” as his chief concerns. And he didn’t want vague promises, he wanted a firm assurance, “etched in blood,” that the trailers would disappear after their 18-month FEMA subsidy ran out. He also wanted the federal agency to sign a deal that would evict any families “involved in any crime while they are FEMA tenants.” If that wasn’t enough, the group added one last request: they wanted a fence built between their subdivision and the trailer park. At a later commission meeting, the same watch group and 100 pissed off suburbanites echoed the same complaints. Referring to themselves as “de facto” flood victims, leaders of the Country Club Estates subdivision reiterated that they didn’t mind their new neighbors. “It’s not true that we don’t want these people in our area,” Benny Williams claimed, “We also don’t want you to bamboozle us after 18 months by coming in and putting in substandard housing.” He added some new caveats to his original demands: not only did he want the trailers removed, but all their pipes and utility lines ripped out as well. Oh, and that six-foot fence they’d asked for? They wanted it higher now, at least nine feet. The Police Department promised more officers, the city said it would look into the higher fence, and Commissioner Tommy Tucker commended the residents for exercising their civic duty. “If everyone in Albany were as proud of their

neighborhoods as you are of yours,” he said, “we wouldn’t have some of these problems.”<sup>45</sup>

Despite all the bluster from disgruntled neighbors, the trailers remained until late January 1995, when the parks began to dwindle. As landlords finally completed repairs on their damaged properties, the rental market stabilized. About ten families a day now siphoned out of the FEMA lots, and by the end of the month three of the eleven trailer parks had closed. Charenthia Thomas exuded the relief felt by those able to leave. “I’m moving out today,” she proclaimed, “My house is fixed and I’m getting out.” “I liked it here,” she admitted, “but I like my home better.” Most of the remaining residents expected to leave soon as well. “I just need some furniture and I can move in,” said Willie Watson, a retired automobile electrician, “I shouldn’t be here much longer than a couple more weeks.” Of the 1,200 families that remained, 800 lived in the smaller travel trailers while they waited for their permanent homes to be repaired. Others waited for a different reason. “Some people haven’t even begun work on their homes,” said FEMA spokesman Charles Scheer, “They want to wait and see if there’s a chance that their homes might be bought out.” For many, that meant several more months at the park.<sup>46</sup>

As FEMA and the city wrestled with the temporary housing crisis, the black residents of south Albany fought to save their old neighborhood. At the heart of the battle stood four flooded schools—Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary, Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School, Flintside Elementary and Coachman Park Elementary. South Albanians

---

<sup>45</sup> Heather Sumner, “Residents Circle the Wagons,” *Albany Herald*, October 11, 1994; Heather Sumner, “SW Albany Residents Protest Trailers,” *Albany Herald*, December 19, 1994.

<sup>46</sup> Wayne Partridge, “Post-Flood Housing Returning to Normal,” *Albany Herald*, January 22, 1995.



wanted them rebuilt where they had stood before the flood. The federal government—which had pledged to pay 90 percent of the rebuilding costs—laid down some rules. If they wanted to rebuild the schools in their original locations, they had to be lifted above the 100-year floodplain, or else all those federal dollars would vanish. A nervous school board leaned toward moving the schools out of the floodplain—on paper the easiest solution. But for the longtime residents of the neighborhood, it wasn't so simple. City Commissioner Arthur Williams led the charge, arguing that relocating would lower property values as people moved out to be closer to the new schools. Local residents simply didn't want to see the schools go. They were part of the community. "It's downheartening not to see kids going to those schools," Willie Davis said, "People are coming back to the neighborhoods and we want the schools back." "You hurt the neighborhood when you can't take small children to a school nearby," Johnny Allen said, adding that "...A lot of people who would have come back are not going to come back." William Wright prophesied a dark economic state of affairs if the schools left. "If you take the schools out," he said, "...that tells investors that even the school system has abandoned the area." The school board hedged, deferring responsibility to FEMA for making the final call. A week later, however, they angered residents when they announced the district would rebuild Coachman Park, Flintside, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary at least a mile away from their original locations. Even worse, they decided not to rebuild Martin Luther King, Jr. Middle School. Instead, they would farm its students to other "expanded" schools across town.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> Todd Douglas, "Board to Conduct Hearings on Relocating Flooded Schools," *Albany Herald*, October 27, 1994; Jenel Williams, "South Albany Residents Want Schools Kept in Their Area," *Albany Herald*, November 16, 1994; Allan Taylor, "Planning Flood

Undeterred, Arthur Williams, Mary Young-Cummings, and William Wright led their neighbors in a prolonged campaign against the decision. Somehow, they had to convince FEMA to change its mind. The only opportunity to do so hinged on a technicality: before the schools could be rebuilt, an Environmental Impact Study had to be done. If they could drum up enough support and make a big enough stink, perhaps they could persuade its authors to recommend rebuilding the schools in the floodplain. So Arthur Williams worked on his fellow commissioners, William Wright marshaled the forces of the NAACP (and his own force of personality), and Mary Young-Cummings mobilized the South Side Mega Flood Task Force for one last fight. For two months, the city commission conducted a tortured search for a consulting firm to pen the study. There were meetings to decide whether to hire a firm, meetings to consider a first round of bids, then a second, then another meeting to vote on the bids, then another meeting because that vote was a tie, and then, finally, on March 28, 1995, the Atlanta firm of Williams, Russell and Johnson began their work.<sup>48</sup>

To their credit, the consultants listened. Throughout the spring and summer of 1995, they held numerous public forums where concerned citizens presented testimony, asked questions, and lobbied to keep the schools. They couldn't deny the collective weight of dissenting voices that materialized at each meeting, and that pressure shaped

---

Recovery," *Albany Herald*, January 19, 1995; Coretta Gooden, "3 Flooded Schools to Be Relocated," *Albany Herald*, January 20, 1995.

<sup>48</sup> Wayne Partridge, "City to Hire Flood Consultant," *Albany Herald*, February 1, 1995; Coretta Gooden, "Commissioner Blasts Hiring of Consultants," *Albany Herald*, February 2, 1995; Alisa DeMao, "Consultant Search Continues," *Albany Herald*, February 17, 1995; Wayne Partridge, "City Tied on Consultant Vote," *Albany Herald*, February 22, 1995; Gary A. Witte, "City Nearing End of Search to Hire Flood Recovery Consulting Firm," *Albany Herald*, March 4, 1995; Gary A. Witte, "City Officials Deadlocked on Flood Consultant," *Albany Herald*, March 7, 1995; Gary A. Witte, "Flood Consultants to Hold Hearings," *Albany Herald*, March 29, 1995.

their report. As the final report took shape in late August, it struck a much different tone. FEMA officials echoed residents' contention that the schools were the "nucleus of the community," and that moving them "would be some disruption to that community fabric." One of the three schools, Flintside, was a lost cause—it stood in the middle of a floodway, a much more perilous location than the other two. Under no circumstances would FEMA rebuild there. But they left the door open on MLK and Coachman Park Elementary. If given the right nudging from the community, perhaps FEMA officials could be persuaded to grant a waiver to rebuild the two schools in south Albany. That chance came on Wednesday, August 25, 1995, when FEMA hosted one last public forum.<sup>49</sup>

Over 40 residents packed into the Southside Middle School. Most of them came to watch the proceedings, but four chose to testify. In polite but forceful tones, Mary Young-Cummings stuck up for her neighborhood. "We want to live in South Albany," she declared, "Most of us located there years ago when there wasn't an option, but it is by choice that we desire to remain in South Albany." She argued that moving the schools even slightly out of the neighborhood perpetuated "the image of being a separate black community where no one wanted to locate unless you were black and unless you were in a certain economic category." This was an opportunity to change that image, to rebuild a stronger, more prosperous south Albany. Next up was William Wright, and he was in no mood to be polite. "Any move to relocate these schools is tantamount to terrorism against the community," he claimed, adding that the move "would leave an area already typified as abandoned and would be a tremendous blow for students and families." And he

---

<sup>49</sup> Gabe Loggins, "Citizens, FEMA Discuss Flood Plan," *Albany Herald*, August 29, 1996.

promised a fight to the bitter end. "If we have to go to the President of the United States, then this we must do as well," he said, "We're without hope but have not given up."

Hank Young followed with a basic note of support: "I think it's important for the record to say that I certainly support the position of that of William Wright...And the record should also note that I support those comments from Mary Young-Cummings." Finally came 77-year-old Rosie Mae Hayes, who spoke straight from the heart, asking for the schools and begging officials to help fix up her home, which had been damaged by the flood. More than anything though, her speech encapsulated a life spent as a black woman in south Albany:

My name is Rosie Mae Hayes. I live at 2518 Harvey Road. I was in the flood. And I want to say that FEMA was kind of good to me because they give me money, not to build my house back but to buy stuff which I lost in the house. But I said why go and buy furniture when you ain't got nowhere to put it. So I took that money and fixed my house the best I could. And that's where I'm living, but I can't get no more help. And I wanted to know why is it that they won't fix my house out there and they building houses on the river bank. I don't understand that, but I'm just – I ain't come here to fuss, I come here to plead. I need some doors, windows. I need some help still at 2518 Harvey Road.

I don't want to go nowhere else to live. And them schools out there, I used to enjoy going to them myself. And, you know, it would be mighty proud or I would be mighty proud if they build those schools back because we got a lot of children out there. We got a lot of children. If you wants to ride through that neighborhood in the evening, I'm talking about when the children are out of school, you will see how many children we got out there. And that is enjoyment for the children and me, too.

I used to love to go out there because just like when school is out, they would help get things out there for the children to do at school. And I go out there and I really enjoyed it. And so I would just wish that they would fix them schools back.

And if they don't help me with my house, I'll live there. I ain't got much longer to live no how. I will live there until I die, because I don't want to get out of it. And if they elevate my house, I got a fireplace and I love it. I love that fireplace so good until I burnt up the first one. They had to come there and build it over. If they elevate it, they're going to tear my fireplace down and I don't want that. But I sure would love to get some help. I would love that. And if it take saying please, I will say please. And if I have to get on my knees, I would do that, too, because I built that house. And when I purchased that lot out there I wasn't

making but three dollars and a half a week. But you know what? I wanted it so bad, I told God about it. And out of three dollars and a half a week, I have five acres of land out there, I paid for, making three dollars and a half a week.

You know I don't want to go nowhere else. You know that, don't you? I want to stay right there. When I built that house out there, I was making seventeen dollars a week. When it got up I was through paying for it because I wanted it. Now, you know, if anybody want anything that bad they don't want to get rid of it. You know that, don't you? And if y'all could help me, I would appreciate it, but if you don't I'm going to stay there until I die, thank you.

When Hayes's testimony was printed in the final report, it was followed by a stock reply from FEMA: "No response required."<sup>50</sup>

Two months later, the 400-page flood recovery plan was unveiled at a contentious meeting held at the Albany Civic Center. Initially it seemed south Albany residents had achieved a victory: the consultants recommended rebuilding the flooded schools on their original sites, and the City Commission agreed. But the Dougherty County School Board—which had the final say—protested, saying they hadn't been consulted at all, and they planned to proceed with their own plan. Then there was FEMA, trying to play both sides. Will Straw, one of the federal planners, noted that schools rebuilt in the floodplain "would be isolated and cut off," but said school leaders could apply for a waiver to keep the original locations—a long shot, but a shot nonetheless. School Superintendent John Culbreath refused. He saw no point in even asking FEMA about a waiver. "It's like

---

<sup>50</sup> Gabe Loggins, "Citizens, FEMA Discuss Flood Plan," *Albany Herald*, August 29, 1996; Partnership for Response and Recovery, "Flood Recovery Activities in Albany, Georgia Associated with Public Schools, Housing, and Businesses: Environmental Impact Statement," Environmental Impact Statement, October 1996, 8–14–8–22, Northwestern University Transportation Library; "Dougherty County, Georgia Death Index," accessed June 24, 2018, <http://www.genealogybuff.com/ga/ga-dougherty-deaths-h2.htm>.

asking the governor to waive the law on seatbelts,” he said. And with that, the fight was over.<sup>51</sup>

As 1996 came, it signaled the beginning of the end of federal involvement in the recovery process. On Thursday, February 1, after nineteen months of meeting with victims, taking phone calls, processing relief applications, and finding temporary housing, FEMA workers closed their Albany office feeling as though they had accomplished something. “Things are better in Albany than a year ago,” said FEMA HR Chief Paul Fay, “This time next year there’ll be somebody who says the same thing.” Since the flood, the five-story glass-lined building had seen thousands come and go, and the noise and commotion of the herculean relief efforts was deafening at times. But on this day there was only the low rustling of stacking tables and loading trucks. The rooms, once filled with people, now contained scores of boxes, disconnected phone lines, and orphaned office equipment bound for some distant warehouse. The closing capped a whirlwind campaign of assistance, with staggering numbers: \$31.8 million in grants for lost furniture, appliances and possessions and \$22.2 million for temporary housing, repairs, and rental assistance dispensed to 8,000 families. Now the doors were closing; it was time for Albany to heal itself.<sup>52</sup>

For south Albanians, the wait continued while the School Board took its time considering every possible site for the new schools except the one they wanted. On Wednesday, October 23, 1996, they finally picked three sites, all of them located out of

---

<sup>51</sup> Gary A. Witte, “Conflict Continues over Differing Plans for Replacement of Four Flooded Schools,” *Albany Herald*, November 3, 1995.

<sup>52</sup> Gary A. Witte, “FEMA to Shut Disaster Doors,” *Albany Herald*, January 26, 1996; Gary A. Witte, “FEMA Completes Mission, Closes Doors in Albany,” *Albany Herald*, February 2, 1996.

the 500-year floodplain. Of course it made sense: by moving the schools a safe distance away, they smoothed the path toward the ultimate goal: a potential \$30 million in FEMA dollars. The real winners of the process were the businessmen, particularly the Atlanta firm of Beers-Moody, which snagged a \$460,000 contract to coordinate the three-year construction project. Another big winner was the Beau-Dou Development Company, which sold a \$3,800 option for one of the chosen sites, paving the way for a final sale of \$34,500. Doug Everett, a City Commissioner who just happened to be a Beau-Dou partner, stood to pocket a good bit of cash. Paul Keenan, who had served as Mayor during the flood, also received good news. His real estate firm, Keenan Georgia Commercial, had sold a \$27,000 option for another school site that would mature into a \$270,000 sale next year. As for the black working class residents of south Albany, they would have to sit back and watch their former schools transform into more empty lots.<sup>53</sup>

The flood recovery would plod along for three more years, and in many ways it still continues. In the process of destroying homes and possessions, the crushing waters of 1994 had also resurrected and showcased the racial tensions that had defined (and continue to define) Albany, Georgia. Race conflict popped out of the floodwaters like coffins. The flood also hastened an ongoing exodus. As the waters left, so did Albany's white residents. What began as a slow trickle turned into a steady stream of white flight northward across county lines into nearby Leesburg. Like many communities across the South, a two-pronged effect followed: black political power increased while white tax dollars were siphoned into new suburban enclaves. Overall, between 1990 and 2000, the

---

<sup>53</sup> Meghan Gourley, "Sites Selected to Rebuild Three Flooded Schools," *Albany Herald*, October 24, 1996; Jane Seccombe, "New School Sites Picked," *Albany Herald*, November 26, 1996.

city lost almost 2 percent of its population while the towns in its metropolitan area grew by 8 percent. Structural factors played a role in this shift, some of them decades in the making. There was the new Interstate 75, which—thanks to obstructionist city fathers in the 1960s—was built some 40 miles from Albany, pushing new settlement decidedly eastward. The decision reverberated throughout the years as the city—now far from a major thoroughfare—struggled to draw in new residents and private investment. “Albany is like a city that has caught its breath and is now waiting for the next big thing to happen,” journalist Randy Southerland observed.<sup>54</sup>

Although the Flint River returned within its banks, it continued to serve—as one report put it—“as the invisible line that separates the ‘haves’ from the ‘have nots.’” In alternating bursts, large private employers laid off workers, closed, or left town completely. These periodic downturns provoked a reshuffling of the city’s population, turning Albany into a predominantly black city. In 1960, 25,000 of Albany’s 60,000 residents were African American. In 2000, African Americans were 50,000 of Albany’s 77,000 residents. That shift became most pronounced in the school systems, which re-segregated so thoroughly that in 2008, nine of every ten Albany students were black. But it wasn’t just “white flight” that affected the city. The migration to the suburbs also took middle class blacks as well, leaving the City of Albany with an increasing proportion of poor, working poor, and skills-deprived residents. The trend is most pronounced in east and south Albany, those old black neighborhoods hit so hard by the flood. Nothing has changed since 1994, and conditions have only deteriorated. A 2012 study described these neighborhoods as incubators for concentrated, racially segregated poverty: 91 percent of

---

<sup>54</sup> Randy Southerland, “Albany/Dougherty County: The Next Big Thing - Georgia Trend,” *Georgia Trend*, May 2007.



the population is black, and the poverty rate hovers around 45 percent. In other words, Albany has become a tale of two cities, divided in half, affluent whites on the west, poor blacks on the east. In east Albany, 40 percent of adults don't have high school diplomas, and only 5.8 percent have college degrees. Blacks, particularly women, make astronomically less than their white counterparts. Black capital is almost nonexistent in east Albany as well: most of the stores and businesses are owned by a variety of white, Indian, Korean, and Chinese entrepreneurs. Just about the only black-owned establishments are the numerous churches that dot the streets. As economic blight increased, so has crime. From 2000 to 2010, Albany's "higher crime" rate—including vehicle theft, larceny, burglary, assault, robbery, rape, and murder—jumped 17 percent. During that same time period, more Albanians were going into jail than coming out. In 2010, the poverty rate of the Albany Metro Statistical Area (MSA) stood at 25.3 percent. In 1969 it was 24.4. Everything has changed and nothing has changed.<sup>55</sup>

One of the few undeniable advancements took place in the political realm, where thanks to the Voting Rights Act, the dissolution of at-large voting in 1975, and a hell of a lot of hard work and white flight, black Albanians have made huge strides. There have

---

<sup>55</sup> Sissy Bowen, "Many Whites See Need for Movement," *The Albany Herald*, November 18, 2001, sec. A; Lee W. Formwalt, *Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Southwest Georgia Freedom Struggle, 1814-2014* (Georgia Humanities Council, 2014), 88. For an in-depth look at the poverty that continues to stymie black economic growth in Albany, see David Erickson et al., eds., "Albany, Georgia: The East Albany Neighborhood," in *The Enduring Challenge of Concentrated Poverty in America: Case Studies from Communities across the U.S.* (Richmond: Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, 2008), 117–24; Amaechi N. Nwaokoro, "Sources, Stigmatization, And Alleviation of Poverty in Albany/Dougherty, Georgia," *The Journal of Applied Business Research* 28, no. 2 (April 2012): 155–70; Amaechi N. Nwaokoro, Clifford Marshall, and Shiwam Mittal, "Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Poverty and Crimes in Albany/Dougherty, Georgia," *Journal of Business & Economics Research* 11, no. 6 (June 2013): 277–92.

been black city commissioners, black police chiefs, black fire chiefs, black state representatives, a black Congressman, and black mayors. There has also been a successful rebranding effort to acknowledge the contributions of the black population. In recent years, new names have been affixed to old buildings and street signs. In 2012, city commissioners finally relented to Yaz Johnson's years of petitioning, and named the City's Public Works Building and Wellness Clinic after Johnnie Johnson. Johnson was not the first black figure to be memorialized on a city structure. There was the C.B. King Federal Courthouse, the Mary Young-Cummings Memorial Park, the Arthur K. Williams Micro Business Center, the Dr. Walter Carl Gordon, Jr. Post Office Building and the Charles M. Sherrod Civil Rights Park. The names, permanently carved into the city's edifice, testify to the courage and tenacity of the leaders now immortalized in brick, as well as to the extent of African-American political progress. But the economic goals envisioned by the Albany Movement's foot soldiers in 1961 have yet to be realized. Looking back on a lifetime of struggle in "The Good Life City," civil rights icon Charles Sherrod reflected on the bittersweet legacy of black progress in southwest Georgia, noting that "politically, we're on the ball, but we're still broke. Boss is still boss."<sup>56</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup> Ashton Pellom, "Johnnie Johnson Memorial Named," May 1, 2012, <http://www.walb.com/story/18013449/johnnie-johnson-memorial-named>; Karen Cohilas, "Post Office Dedicated to Dr. Carl Gordon," *The Albany Herald*, 2009, <http://www.walb.com/story/10244877/post-office-dedicated-to-dr-carl-gordon>; Associated Press, "Courthouse Named in Honor of C.B. King," *The Tuscaloosa News*, November 5, 2002, sec. B; Sissy Bowen, "Many Whites See Need for Movement," *The Albany Herald*, November 18, 2001.

## REFERENCES

**Manuscript Collections**

*American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC*

Voices of Civil Rights Project

Civil Rights History Project

Glen Percy Collection

*Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center*

Voter Education Project Records

*Albany Civil Rights Institute, Albany, GA*

Johnnie Johnson Papers

*Amistad Research Center, Tulane University*

Charles Sherrod Papers

Tom Dent Oral History Collection

*Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta, GA*

Andrew Young Papers

Southern Regional Council Records

*C.B. King Federal Courthouse, Albany, GA*

*Johnson v. City of Albany* Case File

*Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, DC*

Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Civil Rights Documentation Project

*Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Atlanta:*

C.B. King Clippings File, Pre-Presidential Collection

*National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD*

Community Services Administration Records

Office of Economic Opportunity Records

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Records

*National Archives and Records Administration, Morrow, GA*

Records of the U.S. District Court for the Albany Division of the Middle District of  
Georgia

Records of the Georgia Field Office of the Community Action Program

*Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University*

Charles Palmer Papers

Claude Sitton Papers

Constance Curry Papers

Elbert P. Tuttle Papers

Frances Pauley Papers

Joan Browning Papers

Newsweek Papers

Southern Christian Leadership Conference Records

*Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University*

Behind the Veil Oral History Series

*Special Collections, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, Fisk University*

Slater King Papers

*Walter Reuther Library, Wayne State University*

National Sharecroppers Fund Records

United Farm Workers Records

### **Archived Interviews**

*Albany Civil Rights Institute Oral History Collection*

Charles Sherrod, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Bee McCormack, Annette Jones-White, Evelyn Toney, Grace Miller, H.C. Boyd, Jimmy Davis, Lucious Holloway, Mary Alice Shipp, Penny Patch, William G. Anderson.

*Behind the Veil Series, Duke University*

Arthur Searles, Charles Sherrod, Cornelius W. Grant, Josie Miller, Laura Blount, Leola Caldwell, Luke Billingsley, Mamie Nelson, Mary Jenkins, Mary Shipp, Mary Willis, McCree Harris, Melvin George, Robella Taylor, Shirley Sherrod, Thomas Chatmon, Viola Carter, Willie Jackson, Samuel B. Wells.

*Civil Rights History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress*

Charles McDew, Charles Sherrod, Clifford Browner, Grace Miller, Johnnie Ruth McCullar, Louise Broadway, Lucius Holloway, Emma Kate Holloway, Mary Jones, Robert McClary, Sam Mahone, Sam Young, Jr., Shirley Sherrod, Thomas Chatmon, Jr., William G. Anderson.

*Eyes on the Prize Oral History Collection*

Burke Marshall, Charles Sherrod, William G. Anderson, Laurie Pritchett, Andrew Young, Ralph Abernathy.

*Ralph J. Bunche Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University*

C.B. King, Slater King, Marion Page.

*Tom Dent Oral History Collection, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University*

A.C. Searles, Andrew Young, Carol King, Charles Sherrod, Elaine Baker, Jeffrey Haile, Jesse Boone, Juanita Sanders Cobb, Michael Moss, Patricia J. Perry, Peggy Nielson, Rutha Harris, Samuel B. Wells, Stoney Cooks.

*Voices of Civil Rights Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress*

Alma Chatmon, Arthur Williams, Etris L. Smith, Sr., Henry L. Mathis, Jr., Joe Snead, John Perdew, Lovye Cochran, Mardesque Shirley, Patricia Perry-Perdew, Rachel Young-Allen, Randolph Battle, Rutha Mae Harris, Sam Hall, Willie Adams, Willie Mae Thomas.

**Personal Interviews**

William G. Anderson  
Tommy Coleman  
Ed Feaver  
C.W. Grant  
Charles Sherrod  
Shirley Sherrod  
Herbert Phipps  
Glen Percy  
Susan Percy  
Yaz Johnson

**Newspapers and Periodicals**

*Albany Herald*

*Albany Journal*

*Americus Sumter Observer*

*Americus Times-Recorder*

*Aspire (Albany State University)*

*Athens Banner-Herald*

*Atlanta Constitution*

*Atlanta Journal*

*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

*Atlanta Magazine*

*Baltimore Afro-American*  
*Black Enterprise*  
*Brown's Guide to Georgia*  
*Chicago Tribune*  
*Christian Science Monitor*  
*Columbus Enquirer*  
*Communities in Action*  
*Community Economics*  
*Daily Intelligencer*  
*Daytona Beach Morning Journal*  
*Ebony*  
*El Macriado*  
*Eugene Register-Guard*  
*Freedomways*  
*Georgia Trend*  
*Great Speckled Bird*  
*Harlan Daily Enterprise*  
*Jet*  
*Life*  
*Lodi News-Sentinel*  
*Look*  
*Los Angeles Times*  
*McClatchy-Tribune News Service*

*Meriden Journal*

*Motive Magazine*

*Moultrie Observer*

*National Review*

*New Pittsburgh Courier*

*New South*

*New York Times*

*Park City Daily News*

*People & Land*

*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

*Rome News-Tribune*

*Sarasota Herald Tribune*

*Saturday Review*

*Savannah Morning News*

*Savannah News*

*Southern Changes*

*Southern Exposure*

*Spokane Daily Chronicle*

*St. Petersburg Times*

*The Crisis*

*The Dallas Morning News*

*The Dispatch*

*The Fort Scott Tribune*

*The Harvard Crimson*

*The Lewiston Daily Sun*

*The Milwaukee Journal*

*The Modesto Bee*

*The Montreal Gazette*

*The Nation*

*The News and Courier*

*The Ocala-Star Banner*

*The Ottawa Citizen*

*The Owosso Argus-Press*

*The Palm Beach Post*

*The Prescott Courier*

*The Southern Courier*

*The Spokane Daily Chronicle*

*The Spokesman-Review*

*The Sydney Morning Herald*

*The Times Daily*

*The Tuscaloosa News*

*The Virgin Islands Daily News*

*Thomasville Times*

*Tifton Gazette*

*Time*

*Toledo Blade*



*Washington Monthly*

*Washington Post*

*Waycross Journal-Herald*

*Youngstown Vindicator*

## **Legal Cases**

*Anderson v. City of Albany*, 321 F. 2d 649 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1963).

*Anderson v. Kelly*, Civil Action No. 730 U.S. Dist. Lexis 10455 (Dist. Court, M.D. Georgia, Albany Division 1963).

*Bell v. Southwell*, 376 F. 2d 659 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1967).

*Broadway v. Culpepper*, 439 F. 2d 1253 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1971).

*Brown v. Culpepper*, 559 F. 2d 274 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1977).

*Denney v. City of Albany*, 68 F. Supp. 2d 1369 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1999).

*Denney v. City of Albany*, 247 F. 3d 1172 (Court of Appeals, 11th Circuit 2001).

*Foster v. Sparks*, 506 F. 2d 805 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1975).

*Gaines v. Dougherty County Bd. of Educ.*, 775 F. 2d 1565 (Court of Appeals, 11th Circuit 1985).

*Gaines v. Dougherty County Bd. of Education*, 222 F. Supp. 166 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1963).

*Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, 334 F. 2d 983 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1964).

*Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, 392 F. 2d 669 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1968).

*Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, 442 F. 2d 1344 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1971).

*Gaines v. Dougherty County Board of Education*, 465 F. 2d 363 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1972).

*Gaines v. Dougherty Cty. Bd. of Ed.*, 489 F. Supp. 778 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1980).

Johnson v. City of Albany, Ga., 413 F. Supp. 782 (Dist. Court, M.D. Georgia, Albany Division 1976).

Kelly v. Page, 335 F. 2d 114 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1964).

Mann v. City of Albany, 687 F. Supp. 583 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1988).

Mann v. City of Albany, Ga., 883 F. 2d 999 (Court of Appeals, 11th Circuit 1989).

Potter v. City of Albany, 68 F. Supp. 2d 1360 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1999).

Pullum v. Greene, 396 F. 2d 251 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1968).

Rabinowitz v. United States, 366 F. 2d 34 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1966).

Shealy v. City of Albany, Ga., 89 F. 3d 804 (Court of Appeals, 11th Circuit 1996).

Shealy v. City of Albany, Ga., 137 F. Supp. 2d 1359 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 2001).

Smith v. United States, 375 F. 2d 243 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1967).

Thompson v. Sheppard, 490 F. 2d 830 (Court of Appeals, 5th Circuit 1974).

Walton v. Dougherty County School System, 59 F. Supp. 2d 1297 (Dist. Court, MD Georgia 1997).

### **Theses and Dissertations**

Arneson, Stephen. "A Case Study of a Proposed New Community in Lee County, Georgia." MA thesis, University of Georgia, 1971.

Bolster, Paul D. "Civil Rights Movements in Twentieth Century Georgia." PhD dissertation, University of Georgia, 1978.

Cline, David P. "Revolution and Reconciliation: The Student Interracial Ministry, Liberal Protestantism, and the Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1970." PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2010.

Farmer, Mindy J. "Politics in Flux: The Georgians Behind the Republicanization of the South." PhD dissertation, Ohio State University, 2011.

Gaston, Edward Aaron. "A History of the Negro Wage Earner in Georgia, 1890-1940," PhD dissertation, Emory University, 1979.

Griswold, Marqueta N. "If You Can't Find Me in the School Room: Oral Histories of African American Educators and Students During the Albany Movement." Ed.D. dissertation, Georgia Southern University, 2011.

Harrison, Alisa. "'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Round' -- the Southwest Georgia Freedom Movement and the Politics of Empowerment." MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 2001.

Moberly, Richard E. "Testing the Bonds of Segregation." MA thesis, Emory University, 1991.

Mussatt, David J. "Journey for Justice: A Religious Analysis of the Ethics of the 1961 Albany Freedom Ride," PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2002.

Nelligan, Brendan Kevin. "The Albany Movement and the Limits of Nonviolent Protest in Albany, Georgia, 1961-1962." BA thesis, Providence College, 2009.

Schrade, Alan Bradley. "'Bad' Baker, 'Terrible' Terrell, and Pritchett's Albany : SNCC and the Interplay between Rural and Urban Civil Rights Movements in Southwest Georgia." MA thesis, University of Georgia, 1995.

Thompson, Carolyn. "A Story of Hope: Southern Consumers Cooperative and the Origins of the War on Poverty in Southwest Louisiana." M.A., Tulane University, 2000.

### **Government and Institutional Reports**

"A Factual, Economic Survey of Albany, Georgia for Prospective Industry." Albany, GA: Albany Chamber of Commerce, 1960. Hargrett Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

"Equal Opportunity in Farm Programs: An Appraisal of Services Rendered by Agencies of the United States Department of Agriculture." Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1965.

"Flood Recovery Activities in Albany, Georgia Associated with Public Schools, Housing, and Businesses: Environmental Impact Statement." Partnership for Response and Recovery, October 1996. Northwestern University Transportation Library.

"Jobs and Civil Rights: The Role of the Federal Government in Promoting Equal Opportunity in Employment and Training." Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1969.

"New Evidence on School Desegregation." Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1987.

- “Survey of School Desegregation in the Southern and Border States, 1965-66.”  
Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1966.
- “Technology, Public Policy, and the Changing Structure of American Agriculture.”  
Washington, DC: U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, 1986.
- “The Decline of Black Farming in America.” U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, February 1982. Alexander Campbell King Law Library, University of Georgia.
- “The Voting Rights Act: The First Months.” Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1965.
- “The Voting Rights Act, Ten Years After.” Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1975.
- “Title IV and School Desegregation: A Study of a Neglected Federal Program.”  
Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1973.
- Cowan, Tadlock and Jody Feder. “The Pigford Case: USDA Settlement of a Discrimination Suit by Black Farmers.” Congressional Research Service.
- Farr, Jessica LeVeon, and Sibyl S. Slade. “Albany, Georgia: The East Albany Neighborhood.” Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, 2008.
- Lee, Everett Spurgeon, Hortense L Bates, and Douglas C Bachtel. “Georgia’s Black Population.” Athens, Ga.: Cooperative Extension Service, University of Georgia, 1986.
- Lott, Neal and Tom Ross. “1994 Weather in the Southeast: The February Ice Storm and the July Flooding.” National Climatic Data Center Research Customer Service Group, October 12, 1994.  
<ftp://ftp.ncdc.noaa.gov/pub/data/techrpts/tr9403/tr9403.txt>.
- Mittler, Elliott. “An Assessment of Flood Plain Management in Georgia’s Flint River Basin.” Program on Environment and Behavior. Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, 1997.
- Sherman, Jr., Eugene G. and Dolores E. Sherman. “Handbook on Blacks in Albany-Dougherty County, Georgia.” The Center for Research in Social Change, Emory University, 1975. Emory University Library.
- Stamey, Timothy C. “Summary of Data-Collection Activities and Effects of Flooding from Tropical Storm Alberto in Parts of Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, July 1994.” Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1996.  
<https://pubs.usgs.gov/of/1996/ofr96-228/pdf/ofr96-228.pdf>.

———. “Floods in Central and Southwestern Georgia in July 1994.” Accessed May 30, 2018. <http://www.gwri.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/files/docs/1995/StameyT-95.pdf>.

### Scholarly Articles

“The Federal Agricultural Stabilization Program and the Negro.” *Columbia Law Review* 67, no. 6 (1967): 1121–36.

Anderson, Carol, and J. Mills Thornton. “All Politics Are Local: The Primacy of Race, Class, and Municipal Politics on the Civil Rights Struggle in Alabama.” *Reviews in American History* 31, no. 4 (2003): 603–10.

Anderson, William G. “Reflections on the Origins of the Albany Movement.” *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994).

Andrews, Kenneth T. “Social Movements and Policy Implementation: The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement and the War on Poverty, 1965 to 1971.” *American Sociological Review* 66, no. 1 (2001): 71–95.

———. and Michael Biggs. “The Dynamics of Protest Diffusion: Movement Organizations, Social Networks, and News Media in the 1960 Sit-Ins.” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (2006): 752–77.

Atreya, Ajita, and Susana Ferreira. “Seeing Is Believing? Evidence from Property Prices in Inundated Areas: Seeing Is Believing?” *Risk Analysis* 35, no. 5 (May 2015): 828–48.

Bailey, Martha J., and Nicolas J. Duquette. “How Johnson Fought the War on Poverty: The Economics and Politics of Funding at the Office of Economic Opportunity.” *The Journal of Economic History* 74, no. 2 (June 2014): 351–88.

Bellamy, Donnie D. “Henry A. Hunt and Black Agricultural Leadership in the New South.” *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no. 4 (1975): 464–79.

Benze, James G. “Presidential Reorganization as a Tactical Weapon: Putting Politics Back into Administration.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1985): 145–57.

Bundy, M. John and Allen D. Evans. “Racial Discrimination in USDA Programs in the South: A Problem in Assuring the Integrity of the Welfare State.” *Washington Law Review*, no. 45 (1970): 738–46.

- Carlson, Robert A. "Cooperative Extension: A Historical Assessment." *J Ext* 8, no. 3 (1970): 10–15.
- Carr, Robert K. "Screws v. United States: The Georgia Police Brutality Case." *Cornell Law Review* 31, no. 1 (September 1945).
- Chalfen, Michael. "Rev. Samuel B. Wells and Black Protest in Albany, 1945-1965." *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 9 (Fall 1994): 37–64.
- . "'The Way out May Lead In': The Albany Movement Beyond Martin Luther King, Jr." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 560–98.
- Chancey, Andrew S. "'A Demonstration Plot for the Kingdom of God': The Establishment and Early Years of Koinonia Farm." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (July 1, 1991): 321–53.
- Daniel, Pete. "Rhythm of the Land." *Agricultural History* 68, no. 4 (1994): 1–22.
- Davidson, Roger H. "The War on Poverty: Experiment in Federalism." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 385 (1969): 1–13.
- Formwalt, Lee. "The Origins of African-American Politics in Southwest Georgia: A Case Study of Black Political Organization During Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-1867." *Journal of Negro History* 77, no. 4 (1992): 211.
- . "'Corner-Stone of the Cotton Kingdom': W. E. B. Du Bois's 1898 View of Dougherty County." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 693–700.
- . "Moving in 'That Strange Land of Shadows': African-American Mobility and Persistence in Post-Civil War Southwest Georgia." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (October 1, 1998): 507–32.
- Fried, Charles. "Affirmative Action after *City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*: A Response to the Scholars' Statement." *The Yale Law Journal* 99, no. 1 (1989): 155–61.
- Gilbert, Jess, Gwen Sharp, and M. Sindy Felin. "The Loss and Persistence of Black-Owned Farms and Farmland: A Review of the Research Literature and Its Implications." *Southern Rural Sociology* 18, no. 2 (July 2002): 1–30.
- Grim, Valerie. "Black Participation in the Farmers Home Administration and Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, 1964-1990." *Agricultural History* 70, no. 2 (1996): 321–36.
- . "The Politics of Inclusion: Black Farmers and the Quest for Agribusiness Participation, 1945-1990s." *Agricultural History* 69, no. 2 (1995): 257–71.
- Hamilton, David. "The Paper War on Poverty." *Journal of Economic Issues* 5, no. 3 (1971): 72–79.

- Hargis, Peggy G. "Beyond the Marginality Thesis: The Acquisition and Loss of Land by African Americans in Georgia, 1880-1930." *Agricultural History* 72, no. 2 (April 1, 1998): 241-62.
- Hyatt, James A., and Peter M. Jacobs. "Distribution and Morphology of Sinkholes Triggered by Flooding Following Tropical Storm Alberto at Albany, Georgia, USA." *Geomorphology* 17, no. 4 (October 1, 1996): 305-16.
- Ivers, Gregg, and Karen O'Connor. "Minority Set-Aside Programs in the States after City of Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co." *Publius* 20, no. 3 (1990): 63-78.
- Jackson, Vanessa. "In Our Own Voice: African-American Stories of Oppression, Survival and Recovery." *Off Our Backs* 33, no. 7/8 (2003): 19-21.
- Jones, Hezekiah S. "Federal Agricultural Policies: Do Black Farm Operators Benefit?" *The Review of Black Political Economy* 22, no. 4 (1994): 25-50.
- Jong, Greta de. "Staying in Place: Black Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and the War on Poverty in the Rural South." *The Journal of African American History* 90, no. 4 (2005): 387-409.
- McIlvain, Karen Kubovec. "Agricultural Law: FmHA Farm Foreclosures, An Analysis of Deferral Relief and the Appeals System." *Washburn Law Journal*, no. 23 (1984): 287-91.
- Jackson, Vanessa. "In Our Own Voice: African-American Stories of Oppression, Survival, and Recovery in Mental Health Systems." *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work* 2 (2002).
- Klarman, Michael J. "How Brown Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis." *The Journal of American History* 81, no. 1 (1994): 81-118.
- K'Meyer, Tracy Elaine. "'What Koinonia Was All About': The Role of Memory in a Changing Community." *The Oral History Review* 24, no. 1 (July 1, 1997): 1-22.
- Leonard, Jonathan S. "The Impact of Affirmative Action Regulation and Equal Employment Law on Black Employment." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 4, no. 4 (1990): 47-63.
- Logan, John. "Permanent Replacements and the End of Labor's 'Only True Weapon.'" *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 74 (2008): 171-92.
- Martin, Charles H. "Race, Gender, and Southern Justice: The Rosa Lee Ingram Case." *The American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 3 (1985): 251-68.

- . “The Civil Rights Congress and Southern Black Defendants.” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 1 (1987): 25–52.
- McCartin, Joseph A. “‘A Wagner Act for Public Employees’: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976.” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. 1 (2008): 123–48.
- . “‘Fire the Hell out of Them’: Sanitation Workers’ Struggles and the Normalization of the Striker Replacement Strategy in the 1970s.” *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 67–92.
- McLean-Meyinsse, Patricia E., and Adell Brown, Jr. “Survival Strategies of Successful Black Farmers.” *The Review of Black Political Economy* 22, no. 4 (1994): 73–83.
- Mener, Andrew S. “Disaster Response in the United States of America: An Analysis of the Bureaucratic and Political History of a Failing System.” *CUREJ: College Undergraduate Research Electronic Journal*, May 10, 2007.
- Minchin, Timothy J. “‘A Brand New Shining City’: Floyd B. McKissick Sr. and the Struggle to Build Soul City, North Carolina.” *The North Carolina Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2005): 125–55.
- . “Broken Spirits: Permanent Replacements and the Rumford Strike of 1986.” *The New England Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2001): 5–31.
- . “‘It Tears the Heart Right out of You’: Memories of Striker Replacement at International Paper Company in De Pere, Wisconsin, 1987-88.” *The Oral History Review* 31, no. 2 (2004): 1–27.
- . “Torn Apart: Permanent Replacements and the Crossett Strike of 1985.” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2000): 30–58.
- . “Making Best Use of the New Laws: The NAACP and the Fight for Civil Rights in the South, 1965-1975.” *The Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 3 (August 1, 2008): 669–702.
- Murray, Charles. “The War on Poverty 1965-1980.” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 8, no. 4 (1984): 94–136.
- Nasstrom, Kathryn L. “Between Memory and History: Autobiographies of the Civil Rights Movement and the Writing of Civil Rights History.” *The Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 2 (May 1, 2008): 325–64.
- Nwaokoro, Amaechi N. “Sources, Stigmatization, And Alleviation of Poverty in Albany/Dougherty, Georgia.” *The Journal of Applied Business Research* 28, no. 2 (April 2012): 155–70.
- . Clifford Marshall, and Shiwan Mittal. “Exploratory Study of the Relationship Between Poverty and Crimes in Albany/Dougherty, Georgia.” *Journal of Business & Economics Research* 11, no. 6 (June 2013): 277–92.



- O'Brien, Thomas V. "Perils of Accommodation: The Case of Joseph W. Holley." *American Educational Research Journal* 44, no. 4 (2007): 806–52.
- O'Connor, Charles S. "The Politics of Industrialization and Interracialism in Sumter County, Georgia: Koinonia Farm in the 1950s." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 505–27.
- Murphy, Patrick C. "Representing Farmers in Administrative and Court Proceedings Involving the United States Department of Agriculture." *South Dakota Law Review*, no. 29 (1984 1983): 275–81.
- Paulson, Darryl, and Janet Stiff. "An Empty Victory: The St. Petersburg Sanitation Strike, 1968." *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (1979): 421–33.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "My Black Mothers and Sisters or on Beginning a Cultural Autobiography." *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 1 (1982): 81–96.
- Renick, James C. "The Impact of Municipal Affirmative Action Programs on Black Representation in Government Employment: Reality or Rhetoric?" *Southern Review of Public Administration* 5, no. 2 (1981): 129–46.
- Ricks III, John A. "De Lawd Descends and Is Crucified: Martin Luther King, Jr. in Albany, Georgia." *Journal of Southwest Georgia History* 2 (1984): 3–14.
- Rivera, Jason David, and DeMond Shondell Miller. "Continually Neglected: Situating Natural Disasters in the African American Experience." *Journal of Black Studies* 37, no. 4 (2007): 502–22.
- Scher, Howard S., Robert S. Catz, and Gregory H. Mathews. "USDA: Agriculture at the Expense of Small Farmers and Farmworkers." *Toledo Law Review*, no. 7 (1976 1975): 837–62.
- Schweninger, Loren. "A Vanishing Breed: Black Farm Owners in the South, 1651-1982." *Agricultural History* 63, no. 3 (July 1, 1989): 41–60.
- Strain, Christopher. "Soul City, North Carolina: Black Power, Utopia, and the African American Dream." *The Journal of African American History* 89, no. 1 (2004): 57–74.
- Sundquist, James L. "Co-Ordinating the War on Poverty." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 385 (1969): 41–49.
- Vodicka, John. "The Federation of Southern Cooperatives Under Siege." *Southern Changes*. Atlanta: Southern Regional Council 2, no. 8, (July-August 1980).

- Watford, Paul J. "Screws v. United States and the Birth of Federal Civil Rights Enforcement." *Marquette Lawyer*, Spring 2015.
- Westfall, David. "Agricultural Allotments as Property." *Harvard Law Review* 79, no. 6 (1966): 1180–1206.
- White, Richard W. "The CAA Transition Task Force: How Bureaucracy Responded to a Change in Presidential Policy." *Policy Analysis* 2, no. 4 (1976): 623–34.
- Wright, Gavin. "The Civil Rights Revolution as Economic History." *The Journal of Economic History* 59, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): 267–89.
- Zabawa, Robert, Arthur Siaway, and Ntam Baharanyi. "The Decline of Black Farmers and Strategies for Survival." *Southern Rural Sociology* 7, no. 1 (1990): 106–22.

### Books

- Anderson, Norma, and William G. Anderson. *Autobiographies of a Black Couple of the Greatest Generation*. Lansing, MI: Norma L. and William G. Anderson, 2004.
- Araiza, Lauren. *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Arnesen, Eric. *The Black Worker: Race, Labor, and Civil Rights Since Emancipation*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Arsenault, Raymond. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Ashmore, Susan Youngblood. *Carry It On: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 1964-1972*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.
- Ball, Howard. *The Bakke Case: Race, Education, and Affirmative Action*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000.
- Bartley, Numan V. *The Creation of Modern Georgia*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990.
- . *The New South 1945-1980*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996.
- Bass, Jack, and Walter DeVries. *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Consequence since 1945*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.
- Battle, Randy. *The Great Pool Jump & Other Stories from the Civil Rights Movement in Southwest Georgia*. Lancaster, NH: YouArePerfectPress, 2010.

- Beardslee, William R. *The Way Out Must Lead in: Life Histories in the Civil Rights Movement*. Westport, CT: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1983.
- Berg, Manfred. *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.
- Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015.
- Bethell, Thomas N. *Sumter County Blues: The Ordeal of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives: A Report*. Washington, DC: National Committee in Support of Community Based Organizations, 1982.
- Black, Earl, and Merle Black. *The Rise of Southern Republicans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Blum, John Morton. *Years of Discord: American Politics and Society, 1961-1974*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992.
- Boyd, Tim S. R. *Georgia Democrats, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Shaping of the New South*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014.
- Branch, Taylor. *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988.
- . *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.
- Brattain, Michelle. *Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004.
- Brownlee, W. Elliot, and Hugh Davis Graham, eds. *The Reagan Presidency: Pragmatic Conservatism and Its Legacies*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003.
- Brown, Titus. *Albany State University: A Centennial History: 1903-2003*. Mount Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2003.
- Brooks, Joseph. "'The Emergency Land Fund: A Rural Land Retention and Development Model.'" In *The Black Rural Landowner: Endangered Species, Social, Political and Economic Implications*, Leo McGee and Robert Boone (eds.). Greenwood Press, 1979.
- Brundage, William Fitzhugh. *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

- Bullard, Robert D., and Beverly Wright. *The Wrong Complexion for Protection: How the Government Response to Disaster Endangers African American Communities*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.
- Burk, Robert Fredrick. *The Eisenhower Administration and Black Civil Rights, 1953-1961*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984.
- Burns, Robert. *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang!* Brown Thrasher Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997.
- Carson, Clayborne. *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- . *Reporting Civil Rights*. New York: Penguin Putnam, 2003.
- Carter, David C. *The Music Has Gone Out of the Movement: Civil Rights and the Johnson Administration, 1965-1968*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.
- Cazenave, Noel A. *Impossible Democracy: The Unlikely Success of the War on Poverty Community Action Programs*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Chafe, William. *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Chappell, David. *Inside Agitators: White Southerners in the Civil Rights Movement*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.
- Clayson, William S. *Freedom Is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Texas*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
- Clive, Davis Liner. *Glancing Backward: Albany, Georgia 1836-1986*. Peabody, MA: Rose Publishing Company, 1986.
- Cobb, Charles E. *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*. New York: Basic Books, 2014.
- Cobb, James C. *Georgia Odyssey*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.
- Colburn, David R. *Racial Change and Community Crisis: St. Augustine, Florida, 1877-1980*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1991.
- Coleman, Kenneth. *A History of Georgia*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977.
- Colston, Freddie C. (ed.). *Dr. Benjamin E. Mays Speaks: Representative Speeches of a Great American Orator*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002.

- Conkin, Paul. *A Revolution Down on the Farm: The Transformation of American Agriculture since 1929*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2009.
- Crawford, Vicki L, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods. *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965*. Brooklyn: Carlson Pub., 1990.
- Crosby, Emilye. *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, a National Movement*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011.
- Curry, Constance. *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*. Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000.
- . *Silver Rights: The Story of the Carter Family's Brave Decision to Send Their Children to an All-White School and Claim Their Civil Rights*. San Diego: Harvest Books, 1996.
- Dalfiume, Richard M. *Desegregation of the U.S. Armed Forces: Fighting on Two Fronts, 1939-1953*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1975.
- . *The "Forgotten Years" of the Negro Revolution*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Daniel, Frank (ed.). *Addresses of Lester Garfield Maddox, Governor of Georgia, 1967-1971*. Atlanta: Georgia Department of Archives and History, 1971.
- Daniel, Pete. *Dispossession: Discrimination against African American Farmers in the Age of Civil Rights*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.
- . *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880*. University of Illinois Press, 1986.
- Davidson, Chandler, and Bernard Grofman. *Quiet Revolution in the South: The Impact of the Voting Rights Act, 1965-1990*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Davis, John Emmeus. *Origins and Evolution of the Community Land Trust in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2010.
- Dent, Thomas C. *Southern Journey: A Return to the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1997.
- Dittmer, John. *Black Georgia in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977.
- Draper, Alan. *Conflict of Interests: Organized Labor and the Civil Rights Movement in the South, 1954-1968*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994.

- Dwyer, Owen J., and Derek H. Alderman. *Civil Rights Memorials and the Geography of Memory*. Chicago: Center for American Places, 2008.
- Ehrman, John. *The Eighties: America in the Age of Reagan*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Eskew, Glenn T. *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Estes, Steve. *I Am A Man!: Race, Manhood, And The Civil Rights Movement*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2005.
- Fairclough, Adam. *Race and Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915-1972*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999.
- . *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987.
- . *A Class of Their Own: Black Teachers in the Segregated South*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007.
- Fite, Gilbert Courtland. *Richard B. Russell, Jr., Senator from Georgia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Fitzgerald, Deborah. *Every Farm a Factory: The Industrial Ideal in American Agriculture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.
- Fleming, Cynthia Griggs. *In the Shadow of Selma: The Continuing Struggle for Civil Rights in the Rural South*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.
- Forman, James. *The Making of Black Revolutionaries: A Personal Account*. New York: Macmillan, 1972.
- Formwalt, Lee W. "A Garden of Irony and Diversity," in *The New Georgia Guide*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.
- . *Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Southwest Georgia Freedom Struggle, 1814-2014*. Atlanta: Georgia Humanities Council, 2014.
- Garrow, David. *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1986.
- . *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis*. Open Road Media, 2015.
- Glisson, Susan M. *The Human Tradition in the Civil Rights Movement*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Golden, Jeffrey. *Watermelon Summer: A Journal*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Press, 1971.

- Goldfield, David R. *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture, 1940 to the Present*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.
- Good, Paul. *The Trouble I've Seen*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1975.
- Graham, Bradley. *By His Own Rules: The Ambitions, Successes, and Ultimate Failures of Donald Rumsfeld*. PublicAffairs, 2009.
- Graham, Hugh Davis. *The Civil Rights Era: Origins and Development of National Policy, 1960-1972*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Grant, Donald Lee. *The Way It Was in the South: The Black Experience in Georgia*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Gray, James Henry. *Why I Came South: An Address before the Albany Rotary Club*. Albany, Ga., 1946.
- Greene, Melissa Fay. *Praying for Sheetrock: A Work of Nonfiction*. Reading, MA.: Addison-Wesley, 1991.
- Griffith, Barbara S. *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988.
- Grimes, Millard B. *The Last Linotype: The Story of Georgia and Its Newspapers Since World War II*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985.
- Hampton, Henry, Steve Fayer, and Sarah Flynn. *Voices of Freedom: An Oral History of the Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s through the 1980s*. New York: Bantam Books, 1990.
- Hanks, Lawrence J. *The Struggle for Black Political Empowerment in Three Georgia Counties*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.
- Henderson, Harold Paulk. *The Politics of Change in Georgia: A Political Biography of Ellis Arnall*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991.
- Hoff, Joan. *Nixon Reconsidered*. New York: Basic Books, 1995.
- Hogan, Wesley C. *Many Minds, One Heart: SNCC's Dream for a New America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Holley, Joseph Winthrop. *You Can't Build a Chimney from the Top: The South Through the Life of a Negro Educator*. William-Frederick Press, 1948.
- Holloway, Harry. *The Politics of the Southern Negro: From Exclusion to Big City Organization*. New York: Random House, 1969.

- Hollowell, Louise. *The Sacred Call: A Tribute to Donald Hollowell, Civil Rights Champion*. Winter Park, FL: Four-G Pub., 1997.
- Holsaert, Faith S. *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010.
- Howell, Joseph. *Civil Rights Journey: The Story of a White Southerner Coming of Age During the Civil Rights Revolution*. AuthorHouse, 2011.
- James, Hunter. *They Didn't Put That on the Huntley-Brinkley!: A Vagabond Reporter Encounters the New South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Jeffries, Hasan Kwame. *Bloody Lowndes: Civil Rights and Black Power in Alabama's Black Belt*. New York: New York University Press, 2009.
- Jenkins, Mary. *Open Dem Cells: A Pictorial History of the Albany Movement*. Columbus GA: Brentwood Academic Press, 2000.
- Johnson, Charles Spurgeon. *Patterns of Negro Segregation*. New York; London: Harper & Bros., 1943.
- . *To Stem This Tide: A Survey of Racial Tension Areas in the United States*. Boston; Chicago: Pilgrim Press, 1943.
- . *Growing Up in the Black Belt: Negro Youth in the Rural South*. New York: Schocken Books, 1967.
- Jong, Greta de. *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.
- . *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice after the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- Katznelson, Ira. *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: Free Press, 1994.
- Kruse, Kevin. *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York: Warner Books, 1998.
- . and Clayton Riley. *Daddy King: An Autobiography*. New York: Morrow, 1980.



- King, Mary E. *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Morrow, 1987.
- Kirby, Jack Temple. *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960*. Louisiana State University Press, 1986.
- K'Meyer, Tracy Elaine. *Interracialism and Christian Community in the Postwar South: The Story of Koinonia Farm*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997.
- Korstad, Robert Rodgers. *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South*. Univ of North Carolina Press, 2003.
- Kotlowski, Dean J. *Nixon's Civil Rights: Politics, Principle, and Policy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Kousser, J. Morgan. *Colorblind Injustice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Kytle, Calvin, and James A. Mackay. *Who Runs Georgia?* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.
- Lane, Mills. *The People of Georgia*. Savannah: Library of Georgia, 1992.
- Lawson, Mary Sterner. *June Bug's Grocery and the Cornfield Jook: A South Albany Oral History*. Arcadia Publishing, 2003.
- Lawson, Steven F. *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969*. Lexington Books, 1976.
- . *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America Since 1941*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991.
- Lee, Dallas. *The Cotton Patch Evidence: The Story of Clarence Jordan and the Koinonia Farm Experiment*. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Levin, Betsy, and Willis D. Hawley. *The Courts, Social Science, and School Desegregation*. Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1977.
- Lewis, David Levering. *King: A Critical Biography*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971.
- .and Charles W Eagles. *The Civil Rights Movement in America: Essays*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1986.
- Lewis, George. *Massive Resistance: The White Response to the Civil Rights Movement*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2006.

- Lewis, John, and Michael D'Orso. *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- Lomax, Louis E. *The Negro Revolt*. New York: Harper, 1962.
- Long, Michael G. *First Class Citizenship: The Civil Rights Letters of Jackie Robinson*. Macmillan, 2008.
- Lynch, Hollis Ralph. *The Black Urban Condition: A Documentary History, 1866-1971*. New York: Crowell, 1973.
- Lyon, Danny. *Memories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Mack, Kenneth W. *Representing the Race: The Creation of the Civil Rights Lawyer*. Harvard University Press, 2012.
- Marshall, F. Ray, and Lamond Godwin. *Cooperatives and Rural Poverty in the South*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.
- McDonald, Laughlin. *A Voting Rights Odyssey: Black Enfranchisement in Georgia*. Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- McGuire, Danielle. *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement*. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2011.
- McMillen, Neil R. *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994.
- Mollin, Marian. *Radical Pacifism in Modern America: Egalitarianism and Protest*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013.
- Nembhard, Jessica Gordon. *Collective Courage: A History of African American Cooperative Economic Thought and Practice*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014.
- O'Brien, Thomas V. *The Politics of Race and Schooling*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 1999.
- O'Donovan, Susan E. *Becoming Free in the Cotton South*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- Oliphant, Thomas, and Curtis Wilkie. *The Road to Camelot: Inside JFK's Five-Year Campaign*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017.

- Perdew, John. *Education of a Harvard Guy: Fightsoldier in the Civil Rights Movement*. Jonesboro, AR: Granthouse Publishers, 2010.
- Phelps, Wesley G. *A People's War on Poverty: Urban Politics and Grassroots Activists in Houston*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014.
- Powledge, Fred. *Free at Last?: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It*. Boston: Little Brown, 1991.
- Quiros, Ansley L. *God with Us: Lived Theology and the Freedom Struggle in Americus, Georgia, 1942-1976*. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.
- Raines, Howell. *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered*. New York: Putnam, 1977.
- Rasmussen, Wayne D.. *Taking the University to the People: Seventy-Five Years of Cooperative Extension*. Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1989.
- Reid, Debra A., and Evan P. Bennett, eds. *Beyond Forty Acres and a Mule: African American Landowning Families Since Reconstruction*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012.
- Roberts, Gene, and Hank Klibanoff. *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation*. New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2008.
- Rolinson, Mary. *Grassroots Garveyism: The Universal Negro Improvement Association in the Rural South, 1920-1927*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Rose, Harriett DeAnn. *Dallas, Poverty, and Race: Community Action Programs in the War on Poverty*. ProQuest, 2008.
- Rozier, John, ed. *Black Boss: Political Revolution in a Georgia County*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Scott, Emmett Jay. *Negro Migration During the War*. Oxford University Press, 1920.
- Sherrod, Shirley. *The Courage to Hope: How I Stood Up to the Politics of Fear*. Atria Books, 2012.
- Smith, Robert Samuel. *Race, Labor, and Civil Rights: Griggs versus Duke Power and the Struggle for Equal Employment Opportunity*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.

- Soifer, Steven D., Joseph B. McNeely, Cathy Costa, and Nancy Pickering-Bernheim. *Community Economic Development in Social Work*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Sokol, Jason. *There Goes My Everything: White Southerners in the Age of Civil Rights, 1945-1975*. Vintage, 2007.
- Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. New York: Other Press, 2011.
- Swann, Robert. *Peace, Civil Rights, and the Search for Community: An Autobiography*. Great Barrington, MA: Schumacher Center for a New Economics, 2001.
- Tuck, Stephen G. N. *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003.
- Unger, Irwin. *The Best of Intentions: The Triumphs and Failures of the Great Society Under Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon*. New York: Doubleday, 1996.
- Vitek, William, and Wes Jackson. *Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Waldrep, Christopher. *Racial Violence on Trial: A Handbook with Cases, Laws, and Documents*. ABC-CLIO, 2001.
- Watters, Pat. *Down to Now: Reflections on the Southern Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1971.
- Welborn, David M., and Jesse Burkhead. *Intergovernmental Relations in the American Administrative State: The Johnson Presidency*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014.
- Wilkerson, Doxey A. *Agricultural Extension Services Among Negroes in the South*. Conference of Presidents of Negro Land Grant Colleges, 1942.
- Zarefsky, David. *President Johnson's War On Poverty: Rhetoric and History*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005.
- Zellner, Bob. *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement*. Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2011.
- Zinn, Howard. *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*. Boston: South End Press, 2002.