

“NOT TO TRANSFORM A CULTURE, BUT TO PERPETUATE IT”: THE ROLE OF
WHITENESS IN THE DESEGREGATION OF SCHOOLS IN CHATTOOGA COUNTY,
GEORGIA

by

SARAH JANE MCNEIL WIDINCAMP

(Under the Direction of Judith Preissle)

ABSTRACT

In the summer of 1965, eleven years following the U.S. Supreme Court decision declaring segregated schooling unconstitutional, Chattooga County School Board voted to desegregate its public schools through a freedom of choice plan. The story of this rural Appalachian county’s path to school desegregation through the eyes of the white community provides insight into the role of white privilege and white racial identity in both the initial uneventful phases of school desegregation and in the eventual resegregation of the school system some twenty years later. Through the use of personal interviews, newspaper articles, school board minutes, and school publications, the study uncovers the unspoken role of whiteness in this community both before and after school desegregation. The study reveals the extent to which white racial identity governed political, social, and economic decisions in both this rural mountain county and in the state as a whole. In Chattooga County, as in much of the state, the decision to follow the Supreme Court ruling was reached largely because whites believed that

doing so would allow them to maintain control over the state's public schools while also avoiding federal government interference. The unspoken, unidentified belief in white privilege that governed life in the county prior to desegregation continued to control the decisions of its white leaders. Some twenty years following the desegregation of its schools, white parents in the county in growing numbers began to remove their children from the desegregated county school system to place them in the largely segregated schools of the independent Trion School System. The study provides evidence of the role of whiteness in the continuing resegregation of schools in Chattooga County and has implications about this movement in schools throughout Georgia and the Southeast.

INDEX WORDS: Whiteness, Desegregation, Appalachian history, Oral history, Southern history, Racial identity, Georgia history, Education, Resegregation, School history

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most startling patterns in recent educational history is the failure of government-ordered desegregation plans to overcome the forces of racial “exclusion and separation” prevalent in schools throughout the South.¹ Although the courts struck down the principle of “separate but equal” schooling more than fifty years ago, and the actual court-ordered integration of southern schools was completed almost forty years ago, many rural southern school systems maintain *de facto* segregation. This segregation takes several forms. In some systems, black and white students are separated through tracking procedures that place most black students in “low level” or remedial classes, and most white students in “upper level” or college preparatory classes. An even more visible means of segregation is the band of small private academies established in rural counties in southern states throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s—the years of court-ordered desegregation. Other rural counties maintained dual school systems—small city systems and larger county systems that served to segregate students along both racial and socioeconomic lines. Because large numbers of white children in rural counties attend either private academies or the smaller city school systems, the student population in the public county schools in many rural southern communities is predominantly

¹ Bryan Deever, “Living *Plessy* in the Context of *Brown*: Cultural Politics and the Rituals of Separation,” *Urban Review* 26 (December 1994): 273.

African American.² School segregation in the South, though legally abolished in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, remains a fact of life for many rural schoolchildren.

In 1954, the Supreme Court, in *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruled that separate educational facilities were inherently unequal. For the southern United States, this decision marked the final drum beat in what had become a steady cadence toward the dismantling of a segregated school system that was, by design, neither fair nor equal.³ According to renowned social scientist W.E.B. Du Bois, in his seminal work, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, this unequal system is a key ingredient in a larger design in which certain advantages have been conferred on white laborers simply for having white skin. Along with “public deference” and free access to public functions, the advantages conferred on whites include “the best schools ... [and] schoolhouses ... [that] were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and ... cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools.”⁴

Du Bois referred to this social advantage afforded persons with white skin as a “public and psychological wage.”⁵ Poor, landless white workers came to define themselves primarily as white, rather than as workers, in a desire to enjoy the status gained from the “psychological wage” of being white. Maintenance of the privileges associated with white skin depended on the

² Georgia Department of Education, *Annual Report*, 1996-1997; 1998-1999; C. Freeman, B. Scafidi, and D.L. Sjoquist, *Racial segregation in Georgia public schools, 1994-2001: Trends, causes, and impacts on teacher quality*. Paper presented at Resegregation of Southern Schools Conference, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2002.; Georgia Department of Education *School Report Card*, 2009-2010.

³ A number of court cases paved the way for the *Brown* decision. For example, *Sweatt v. Painter* (1949) states that Texas must allow black law students to attend the all white Texas Law School because the separate law school for black students provided a less than equal legal education; *McLauren v. Board of Regents* (1950) found that the segregation of a black law student within an all-white law school was a denial of equality before the law.

⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1935) 700-701.

⁵ Du Bois, p. 700.

ability of poor whites to join in the elite class's oppression of blacks and to tie themselves to a system that, according to Du Bois, "degraded poor whites equally with the slaves."⁶ The extant southern color line meant that poor whites could not imagine a "fight of united white and black labor against the exploiters" because that would eliminate the distant hope that some day they, too, might join the planter class.⁷

Building on the work of Du Bois, a number of historians in the past decade have renewed the investigation of the effects of the psychological wage of being white on the development of a white working class identity. These historical works label white racial identity, and the privileges associated with that self-definition, as "whiteness."⁸ In his premier study of how working class Europeans came to consider themselves white, David Roediger explains that "the status and privilege conferred by race" made up for the alienation and exploitation experienced by white workers in their relationship with elite whites.⁹ In spite of the common interests of black and white workers, poor whites aligned themselves with the planters rather than their fellow workers. Maintenance of this alignment required that white workers define themselves as "not black," and view their black neighbors as "other." The examination of this desire to maintain the idea of a social hierarchy based on skin color and the role of the economically and

⁶ Du Bois, p. 29.

⁷ Du Bois, p. 27.

⁸ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso), 1993; Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso), 1994; Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge), 1995; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books) 1998.

⁹ Roediger, p. 13.

politically powerful whites in the perpetuation of this process are the focus of this study of school desegregation in rural Georgia in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Whereas a number of historians recently have examined the effects of the struggle over the legal dismantling of the system of racial privilege as played out in the public schools in the southern United States, few have followed the lead of Du Bois and studied the phenomena of school desegregation through the lens of white racial identity, or whiteness. Along with historians, a number of educators and educational anthropologists have chronicled the lack of success of *de jure* desegregation.¹⁰ Few of these researchers, however, have looked at the role of white racial identity and the interrelationship of social class and race as factors in this ongoing struggle over school integration. Examining these issues of race and social class offers a fresh perspective to the study of a problem that continues to impact the schools of the rural, urban and suburban southern United States. This first chapter outlines both the nature and objectives of the study and the literature that serves as both a theoretical and historical backdrop for the study, and the methods employed by the researcher including researcher bias. Finally, the chapter lays out the procedures for reporting research data as a way to provide direction to the reader.

Genesis of the Study

In the summer of 2002, I went to interview with the principal of Trion High School about a teaching position. I had moved to Chattooga County just a month earlier and knew very little

¹⁰ Educational anthropologists have shown, through various ethnographic studies, the *de facto* segregation that exists in schools throughout the United States. G. Orfield, W.E. Eaton, *et al. Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education*. (New York: New York Press, 1996). G. Orfield, C. Lee, *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies*. A Report of the Civil Rights Project, UCLA, August 2007. Elizabeth Rowley, "Ethnographic Study of a Desegregated North Georgian County Elementary School Twelve Years Post *De Jure*, *Social Science Education*. Athens, GA, University of Georgia, 1983.

about the area, its history, or its two school systems. After about an hour, the principal led me outside to the back of the school building to show off the beauty of the mountains that surrounded the Trion school complex, built on a hill at the highest point in town. As the interview came to its close, the principal, in an effort to highlight his school's excellence, commented, "We are not a private school, but we are the next best thing to it. We don't have to deal with discipline problems with blacks or Hispanics or any of that. If one of our kids messes up, I simply tell him, 'Congratulations, you've just become a Chattooga Indian.'" From that point forward, I became intrigued with the development of a school system that viewed itself as superior to the other, larger public school system in the county, in part, because of the demographic makeup of the student body in the two systems. I wanted to understand the historical evolution of these two school systems and the county in which they co-existed as they encountered the overriding issues of race and school desegregation. This dissertation is a product of that quest.

Perhaps because I had experienced similar encounters with other white southerners throughout my life, the most interesting and perplexing part of this story was the ease with which the white principal of Trion High School shared these views with me, a stranger to him and a newcomer to his community. All he knew of me, other than my schooling and my teacher certification, was that I was a white southerner. I wondered if my race and my southern heritage had led him to assume that I shared his attitudes toward public schooling and race. The research questions that emerged from this encounter with the principal of this small rural southern high school were grounded both in my background as a southern white female and in the literature of white privilege and white racial identity introduced to me during my doctoral studies. This work seeks to intertwine the story of the historical struggles with school desegregation as played out in

this one Appalachian county with the theoretical understanding of white racial identity that has become the centerpiece of historical whiteness studies. As such, the work begins the task of applying the theory of whiteness to the actual unfolding of life in this small southern Appalachian county as it wrangled with the social and political upheaval of school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, the study sheds light into the continuing struggle of school segregation and resegregation prevalent in public schools throughout the southern United States.

Nature and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is two-fold: to examine the role of white identity and white privilege in the struggle over desegregation policy in the Appalachian region of Georgia in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and building on this information, to discover something of the role of economically and politically powerful whites of rural, Appalachian Georgia in the protection of separate schooling. The intent of this second question is to examine more closely the interrelationship of race and social class as expressed in the struggle over school desegregation in rural Georgia. As a point of reference, the study examines this struggle as played out in the public schools of Chattooga County—a small county in the largely agricultural and textile-producing northwest corner of Georgia. The project looks at desegregation policy from the viewpoint of the white residents who worked to maintain their segregated schools. It seeks to uncover the forces that helped drive a county with a population of fewer than 25,000 people to continue the segregation of its children through maintenance of a dual city-county school system at great expense to itself and to the state as a whole.

In this effort, the study first asks what role was played by whiteness—white racial identity and the “psychological wage” tied to that identity—in the struggle against desegregation in rural Chattooga County, Georgia. To uncover this information, the study seeks answers to a

number of other questions. What is revealed about white racial identity in the actions and words of the state and regional leaders who worked to maintain segregated schooling? What were Chattooga County's white residents' perceptions of, and reactions to the national, state, and local events leading to the desegregation of schools in this rural county? What were the motives behind the efforts, by whites in Chattooga County, to maintain separate schooling for their children? What were they trying to protect? In what ways was the resistance toward school desegregation intertwined with the white residents' fears about loss of community? What does the resistance reveal about the sense of community among Chattooga County's white residents? What does this sense of community reveal about the white residents' definition of what it meant to be white in this Appalachian Georgia county in the late 1960s and early 1970s?

By focusing on whiteness as a factor in the Appalachian South's struggle against school desegregation, this study expands the work of the small number of historians, like Roediger, interested in the development of white racial identity and the effects of this development on white working class identity. Whereas this growing number of historians has dealt with the impact of whiteness on northern working class whites and poor southern laborers, few have looked at the concept of whiteness in relation to the intense battle by southern whites to maintain a segregated school system during the 1960s and 1970s. Herein lies the significance of this study. Although Grace Elizabeth Hale's work, *Making Whiteness*, examines the South's intentional creation of a "common whiteness" through the establishment of a collective racial identity from Reconstruction to 1940, her study addresses neither the years of court-ordered desegregation nor the issue of race and education. The study of Chattooga County, then, is unique in its examination of whiteness at a more recent historical juncture in which southern

whites believed their distinct racial identity, and the privileges connected with that identity, were under attack.

In addition to expanding the extant whiteness literature, the study of Chattooga County also adds to the large body of desegregation literature. As the study of a southern community during the years of desegregation, it focuses on the interrelationship of race and education from the perspective of the white community rather than from that of the African American community.¹¹ This focus on the white community's perceptions of school desegregation is especially significant today because of the resegregation of schools occurring throughout both the rural South and the nation as a whole.¹² Because education policy making in rural southern counties, and in much of the South, is still controlled by members of the white community, any hope of understanding the forces involved in the resegregation of southern schools requires a deeper understanding of southern whites' views of race and racial identity during the initial stages of school desegregation.¹³

¹¹ Examples of community studies of the effects of desegregation on the African American community include these: Melissa Fay Green, *Praying for Sheetrock* (New York: Faucett Columbine), 1992; Robert A. Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia, 1954-1989* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 1992; David Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 1994; David Applebome, "Wilmington, North Carolina: Back to the Future at Williston High," In *Dixie Rising; How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (New York: Times Books), 1996; Applebome, "Selma, Alabama: Crossing the Bridge, Calling the Roll, Keeping the Faith, Thirty Years On" In *Dixie Rising*.

¹² *Resegregation of Public Schools: The Third Generation; a report on the condition of desegregation in America's public schools by the Network of Regional Desegregation Assistance Centers* (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement), 1989; G. Orfield and C. Lee, *Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies*

¹³ A number of scholars have written about the positive impact of re-segregation on African American children when that segregated schooling is a result of choice. Examples of these scholars are: Jerome Morris and Vanessa Siddle-Walker. However, a number of other scholars assert that the creation of small, predominantly white academies throughout the rural South has left the public schools largely under-funded and predominantly African American. For example, these include: Bryan Deever, "Living *Plessy* in the Context of *Brown*: Cultural Politics and

Understanding the roots of the current struggle against school integration leads to one focus of this study of Chattooga County: the role of politically, socially, and economically powerful whites—the business owners, political officeholders, and professional people of Chattooga County’s white community in the struggle to maintain separate schooling for their children. What role was played by these politically and economically elite whites, on the regional, state and local levels, in the promotion of separate schooling for white children in rural Georgia? What were the perceptions of race of the wealthy and powerful whites who dominated the legislatures and school boards and who made school policy and public funding decisions in rural Georgia? Knowledge of the motives and perspectives of this group of powerful whites is essential to uncovering the roots of the struggle against desegregation in rural Georgia schools in the late 1960s. This knowledge is relevant because often the powerful whites who controlled funding and policymaking decisions in rural counties were the same people who removed their own children from the public schools to enroll them in all-white academies established during the years of desegregation in the South.¹⁴ In Chattooga County, like other small counties throughout Georgia, this dual school system came in the form of a city-county public school system: the county school system, though largely white, populated by children from all areas throughout the county, and a smaller, almost 100% white, city school system in Trion that accepted “qualified” students from the county on a tuition basis. Though Chattooga County was

the Rituals of Separation, “*Urban Review* 26 (December 1994); Helen Hershkoff and Adam S. Cohen, “School Choice and the Lessons of Choctaw County,” *Yale Law and Policy Review* 10 (January 1992) 1-29. Deever and Hershkoff and Cohen assert that this re-segregation leads to the stigmatization of the predominantly African American public schools as inferior.

¹⁴ Hershkoff and Cohen; John Rozier, *Black Boss: Political Revolution in a Georgia County* (Athens: UGA Press, 1982).

never home to a private academy, it was, and is home to a publicly funded city school system that serves as the “school of choice” for many middle class white families in this rural county.

Examining the development of the Trion City School system as an alternative educational choice for the children of Chattooga County helps uncover the motives of white parents who worked to maintain racially segregated schooling for their children. Although the Trion City Schools were a public school alternative to the Chattooga County School System, how did the establishment of a tuition-based public school system within this small rural county reflect the desire to maintain segregated schooling for white children of Chattooga County? In what ways do the motives behind the establishment of the Trion City Schools as a public school alternative for families throughout Chattooga County mirror the motives of local, state, and regional leaders in the segregation academy movement? What do the actions of these local and state leaders in the segregation academy movement suggest about their attitudes toward both community and white racial identity?

By focusing on issues of both race and social class, this study of Chattooga County joins the work of historians like Theodore Allen who examine the role of propertied, powerful European-Americans in the development of white racial identity and white privilege. Allen’s work looks at how elite whites, though outnumbered, maintained social control over enslaved Africans and poor whites alike. Through detailed historical analysis, Allen concludes that the system of racial privilege for property-less whites was deliberately and legally instituted by wealthy, land-holding whites to align poor whites with the planter class in opposition to African American slaves. Property owners hoped that the establishment of the legal and social privileges of whiteness would help organize property-less whites as a “buffer” against the possibility of an insurrection by a united front of African Americans and poor whites. The effectiveness of this

“buffer” depended on the willingness of lower class whites to keep non-whites “in their place.”¹⁵

Both Grace Hale and Noel Ignatiev define the unique nature of this U.S. color caste, still alive in the Twentieth Century South, as a system in which the lowliest whites enjoyed a greater status than the “most distinguished blacks.”¹⁶

During the years of legally enforced school integration, most wealthy and powerful whites came to see that equal educational opportunity for African American southerners threatened to end the color line that both defined southern society and ensured the continuation of the southern power structure in the hands of a wealthy few. As Hale explains, in the deliberately established culture of segregation following the years of Reconstruction, whiteness itself was defined by Jim Crow laws. To be white meant to be one who rode in a superior train car, drank from a superior water fountain, and attended a superior school; therefore, to be white was, by definition, to be a superior person regardless of wealth or character.¹⁷ If the psychological wages once preserved only for those considered “white” were made available to all persons, then the frightening prospect for wealthy southern whites was a society with little distinction among members of the working class. The color line, then, served as a tool for maintenance of a fragmented working class that lacked either the political or the numerical strength to challenge the extant southern power structure.

As with most counties throughout Georgia and the Southeast, the school systems of Chattooga County continued to maintain segregated schools even after the Supreme Court’s

¹⁵ Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, p. 14.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Hale, *The Making of Whiteness.*; Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*.

¹⁷ Hale, *The Making of Whiteness*.

ruling that such system were unconstitutional. Unlike rural counties in southern and middle Georgia, but following the demographic pattern of most rural Appalachian counties, the white population in Chattooga County accounted for nearly 90 percent of the county's population in the 1950s and 1960s. For this reason, school desegregation in Chattooga County was accomplished with little or no violence and fanfare. Nevertheless, many whites continued to look for educational alternatives for their school age children. Following the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the school boards of Chattooga County and Trion City Schools followed the letter of the law by allowing limited numbers of black students to enroll in their majority white high schools. However, the boards refused to create a fully integrated school system in which all students—black and white—attended a single, unified high school. When, in 1965, the school board members learned that their systems would lose all federal funding if they failed to comply with the court-ordered desegregation ruling, the boards in both Trion and Chattooga County reluctantly created fully integrated school systems. What they failed to do, however, was to bring together all the children in this small county of nearly 25,000 people. By refusing to merge the two systems, the county left open a door for establishment of a publicly funded, largely segregated, school system as an alternative for white middle class families in the county.

This study of the historical struggle over school desegregation in Chattooga County not only examines the place of racial identity in this community, but also has implications for the continued impact of this force in the *de facto* segregation of many southern school systems today. By focusing on whiteness as a motivating factor in the struggle over desegregation, this study “displaces [whiteness] from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of

dominance.”¹⁸ This unclinking of the supposed racial “norm” is essential for public schooling where an increasingly white teaching force struggles to effectively educate an increasingly diverse student population.¹⁹ This study sheds some light on the failure of many of the South’s integrated rural schools and the reasons for continued segregation of black and white students within supposedly desegregated school systems across the South.

Review of Literature

Further understanding of this relationship between white racial identity and the struggle surrounding school desegregation requires critical analysis of both the literature on the historical development of whiteness and the historical research and interpretations of southern school desegregation. This study analyzes each of these bodies of work separately and draws correlations between the two bodies of research when appropriate. The analysis of whiteness literature proceeds along a chronological framework beginning with Du Bois’s classic work, *Black Reconstruction*, and continuing with more recent works of labor historians David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and Theodore Allen. The whiteness literature analysis concludes with some examples of the most recent studies that examine the concept of whiteness from a perspective that is more southern in general and more Appalachian in particular.

Following the analysis of historical whiteness literature is an examination of various works on the desegregation of southern schools. These works are organized more thematically. The first works set the stage for the desegregation issue by examining the roots of the South’s

¹⁸ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge), 1993.

¹⁹ Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, “Historic Reversals, Accelerating Resegregation, and the Need for New Integration Strategies,” A report of the Civil Rights Project, August 2007.

dual system of schooling. Once this foundation is laid, the historical analysis turns to those works that focus on both the political and social reaction of the white-dominated South to court-ordered desegregation.

Whiteness Literature

Before proceeding with the development of the literature surrounding whiteness studies, it is important to define the concept of race as used throughout this study. According to social scientists Michael Omi and Howard Winant, instead of a genetically prescribed trait, race is a culturally derived and socially transmitted category into which humans group one another.²⁰ This understanding of race as culturally determined categorizations is at the very core of historical whiteness studies.

Few historians interested in race and race relations have studied the subject from the perspective of white racial identity formation. Although writing about the experiences of freed black slaves during Reconstruction, Du Bois was one of the first historians to recognize the need to understand whiteness as a significant component in the analysis of the development of the African American community. Du Bois recognized that Europeans did not arrive in North America identifying themselves as “white.” This racial identification was developed, according to Du Bois, in an effort by poor, landless European immigrants to align themselves with the wealthy, propertied elites because of the “psychological wage” gained through this supposed racial kinship. Reginald Horsman purports that this idea of racial kinship was born of a myth that all Europeans descended from a single Germanic ancestor. According to this myth, other races were innately inferior to the Anglo-Saxons whose ancestors originated in the southern slopes of

²⁰ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge) 1986.

the Caucasus Mountains. Proof of this Caucasian superiority lay in the fact that the English nation was superior to all others in the 18th and 19th centuries in economic and political success.²¹

Southerners often drew on this belief in the biological superiority of the “white” race to justify the continued enslavement of growing numbers of African Americans throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. According to the southern slave owners, the Anglo-Saxons were destined, not only to populate the entire North American continent, but also to “supplant” the inferior races that inhabited the lands. The Anglo-Saxon “race” was destined to rule and, according to this line of thinking, the African “race” was destined to be ruled. For southerners, proof of African inferiority lay in the very fact that they were enslaved. Therefore, the enslavement of Africans in the United States became its own proof that this “race” of people was morally and socially inferior; the only reason they survived was because of the paternalistic efforts of slave owners who cared for a group of people who, left to their own devices would perish.

Intertwined with proof of the inferiority of enslaved Africans being that they acted like slaves was the idea that European American superiority rested in the ability of these white-skinned people to act like free citizens. Following the American Revolution, the ideal society was characterized as a republic of small, independent producers. In contrast, entering the nineteenth century, most European immigrants were losing their independent artisan status and growing increasingly wage dependent. Anxious over this loss of independence and their submersion into “wage slavery,” workers found it necessary to distinguish between their position as wage dependent and the comparatively similar position of enslaved African Americans. To

²¹ Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny; The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 1981.

this end, working class European Americans constructed the image of black slaves as dangerous to the republic because they failed to embody the republican ideals of “virtue and resolve.” In the minds of white workers, then, black slaves were the antitheses of republicanism and deserved to be slaves because they acted “slavish.”²²

Using the logic that blames those oppressed for allowing themselves to become oppressed, wage laborers turned the republican hatred of slavery into a republican hatred of slaves.²³ To separate themselves fully from these slaves, white workers created an image of themselves as more equal with the master than with the black slave. These workers reasoned that at least they, unlike the lifetime bondsmen, owned their own labor that they could sell at will. To maintain this somewhat artificial distinction between themselves and African slaves, white laborers engaged in a campaign to construct the image of black as “other.” This desire—grounded in economic insecurity—was the basis of the extreme race hatred often exhibited by poor whites toward African Americans in the North during the nineteenth century. This aspect of white racism figures prominently again in the twentieth century battles over school desegregation. J. Anthony Lukas’s account of three families’ dealings with school desegregation in Boston is an excellent example of how the economic basis for racial hatred was played out in U.S. homes during the struggle over school desegregation in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁴

²² Roediger, p. 59-60.

²³ Roediger, p. 59. Roediger explains that in this way of thinking, white workers invoked the ideal of *Herrenvolk* in which African American were removed from the ranks of producers so that slaves, rather than the owner class, became the enemy of the republic.

²⁴ J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground: A Turbulent Decade in the Lives of Three American Families* (New York: Random House, 1985)

As asserted by Hale in *The Making of Whiteness*, the desire to maintain a color line in U.S. society did not fade with the emancipation of slaves in the 1860s and the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment. Jim Crow laws were established by whites after Reconstruction as a way to maintain the color line that emancipation might otherwise have erased. A society in which persons were judged simply by merit meant that elite whites might lose their elevated positions atop the economic and social ladder. To avoid this unacceptable outcome, wealthy whites levied their political power to regulate the public spaces of whites and blacks alike so that racial identity was defined according to an individual's position on the train, in the bus, and in the public school classroom. As in slave times, African Americans were denied access to jobs and to educational opportunities and then were condemned by white society for being "lazy" and uneducated.

This legally framed interpretation of merit based solely on skin color was the basis for the "psychological wage" of whiteness referred to by Du Bois in his twentieth century writings. Drawing on these works, the sociologist, Gunnar Myrdal, in *An American Dilemma* also examined the role of poor whites in raising the "color bar" in U.S. society. As such, Myrdal concurred with Du Bois that poor whites saw it "in their best interest ... to stress the fundamental equality among all white people, ... and the gulf between whites and Negroes."²⁵ Myrdal found that the notion of class difference, particularly in the South, was subsumed under the construct of race because whiteness was the weak thread that loosely tied poor whites to the wealthy and powerful elite class. Without whiteness, poor whites saw no hope of one day rising out of their current economically and socially depressed conditions.

²⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, Vol. II* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997) p. 582.

Unlike Du Bois, Myrdal saw social inequality and racial segregation in the United States as rooted in a single fear—the fear of racial “amalgamation.” This fear, Myrdal claimed, was the “principle around which the whole structure of segregation of the Negroes—down to disfranchisement and denial of equal opportunities on the labor market—is organized.”²⁶ From Thomas Bailey’s early twentieth century book on southern racial attitudes, Myrdal quotes these lines: “For, say what we will, may not all the equalities be ultimately based on potential social equality, and that in turn on intermarriage? Here we reach the real crux of the question.”²⁷ Herein lay the value of Myrdal’s work; it recognized that both the economic and sociological implications intertwined within the South’s culture of racial oppression.

Although he acknowledged that the socially driven fear of racial amalgamation lay at the core of segregation and racial oppression, Myrdal, like Du Bois, strongly emphasized the precarious economic condition of poor whites as a prime factor in their desire for “caste demarcation.” His works serve as a precursor to the whiteness studies that have gained attention from social historians within the past two decades. In describing poor southern whites, Myrdal wrote the following:

They are the people likely to stress aggressively that no Negro can ever attain the status of even the lowest white. The educated Negro, the Negro professional or businessman, the Negro landowner, will particularly appear to them “uppity,” “smart,” and “out of place.” ... They want all Negroes kept down “in their place”—this place is to them defined realistically as under themselves ... They will insist that the caste etiquette be enforced upon the rising Negroes as well as upon lower class Negroes.²⁸

²⁶ Myrdal, p. 587.

²⁷ Thomas Pearce Bailey, *Race Orthodoxy in the South and Other Aspects of the Race Question* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1914)p. 2, as quoted in Myrdal, p. 587.

²⁸ Myrdal, p. 597.

In his book, *How the Irish Became White*, Noel Ignatiev builds on these ideas of the interrelationship of economic determinism and racial identity. Among no group of immigrants, Ignatiev claims, was the struggle to become “white” more evident than with the Irish-Americans. The chronicle of their journey from a position of ethnic “other” to that of “white” is a story of a people fighting for even a limited degree of social and economic opportunity in a society closed to non-whites. Ignatiev asserts that the racial journey of the Irish in the United States was a deliberate strategy to “secure an advantage in a competitive society.”²⁹ Although becoming white guaranteed the Irish neither economic success nor social equality, it did guarantee them citizenship in a republic where they had the “right to elect and to be elected, to be tried by a jury of their peers, to live wherever they could afford, and to spend ... whatever money they managed to acquire.”³⁰ Reminiscent of both Du Bois and Roediger, Ignatiev argues that, after emancipation, the claim to citizenship and the ensuing psychological benefits were dependent solely on a worker’s ability to be “not black.”

Relying on Du Bois’s work as a foundation, both Roediger and Ignatiev illustrate the psychological wages of whiteness as an incentive for the development of the “white” worker. However, these studies fail to explore the origins of either this psychological wage or the ensuing color line this wage created in U.S. society. What was the incentive for the development of this psychological wage and the exclusion of all African Americans, whether slave or free, from U.S. citizenship? Although Ignatiev ignores some historically documented caste systems when he asserts that, although slavery has existed for centuries “without prejudice of color, language, or

²⁹ Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge) p. 2.

³⁰ Ignatiev, p. 3.

tribe,” and without requiring “non-slave members of the designated group be branded as inferior,” he accurately portrays the development of a definite color caste in nineteenth century United States in which the lowliest whites enjoyed a greater status than the “most distinguished blacks.”³¹

Uncovering the origins and nature of this unprecedented color line is the focus of Theodore Allen’s study, *The Invention of the White Race*. The significance of Allen’s work is twofold: its inclusion of the South in the search for the roots of whiteness, and its focus on the role of the propertied class in the establishment of the U.S. color caste. In his thesis, Allen addresses the question of how Anglo-Americans could sustain the high degree of social control necessary to maintain slave labor. In his well-established attempt to answer this question, Allen declares that there were no “white” people in Virginia until almost sixty years after the first Africans arrived in 1619. Racism, then, was not the cause, but, the result of slavery. Using the Irish experience as a mirror into racial oppression in continental North America, Allen asserts that the system of racial privilege for property-less whites was deliberately and legally instituted to align poor whites with plantation owners in opposition to African American slaves. Property owners hoped that the establishment of the legal and social privileges of whiteness would help organize poor whites as a “buffer” against the possibility of a united labor insurrection. Because the continued social and civil wage of whiteness depended on the willingness of poor whites to keep non-whites “in their place,”³² the invention of a color line relieved owners of their greatest

³¹ Ignatiev, p. 99-100.

³² Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso, 1994) p. 14.

fear—a cooperative effort by enslaved Africans and the property-less European Americans to dismantle the system of social control established by the propertied class.

The linkage of inferiority with skin color continued to shape race relations throughout the twentieth century United States. Much of the separatist rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s in the South promoted separate schooling for black and white children based on the belief in the inherent intellectual inferiority of African Americans. The image of the mentally and morally inferior African had been ingrained in the white psyche since colonial days. Not only did it shape the racist rhetoric of the civil rights era of the 1960s, but it also shaped the more subtle racism that, though often unspoken, revealed itself in the decision by rural southern whites to remove their children from public schools rather than have them sit in class with a child of color. In Chattooga County, as in other similar rural districts, it led to the development of either a city or a county school system as a “school of choice” where parents paid a small tuition to enroll their children in predominantly white public schools in whose district the family did not live. The significance of this study of desegregation in rural southern schools through the lens of whiteness rests in its continuation of the search to understand the nature and origins of the attitude of white superiority and its impact on the daily lives of southerners. In particular, the study examines Allen’s thesis that the fight against school desegregation was yet another battle in the continuing struggle to maintain the “social, psychological, and political advantages” of whiteness that, by the late twentieth century, had become a way of life for white southerners—both rich and poor.

Unlike Allen’s work and the work of other historical whiteness researchers however, this study steps away from the examination of whiteness only through the perspective of the northern labor movement. Instead, it shifts the focus southward to examine the impact of whiteness on the social and political realities of a region where race and racial oppression play an integral role in

everyday life. Furthermore, by using the concept of whiteness as the lens through which to view a specific historical event, school desegregation in one southern Appalachian county, the study removes whiteness from its theoretical pedestal and places it at center stage in the realm of the real life drama of children and schooling.

School Desegregation Literature

Along with the study of whiteness, the unraveling of the forces at work in the desegregation of southern schools in the 1960s and 1970s requires an understanding of the initial development of the South's dual education system. Although sometimes criticized for his use of unsubstantiated perception of the "unique nature" of the South and his advocacy of the southern "guilt theory," W.J. Cash argued, more than twenty years before southern school desegregation, that the public schools were tools used by wealthy and powerful whites to perpetuate a system of social control through racial separation and white privilege. In his classic treatment of the southern economy and southern society, *The Mind of the South*, Cash expressed his impression of the interrelationship between white southern leaders and public schooling in the following words:

Within the factory we shall make the South rich. And winning riches, we shall be able fully to develop the school. And with the school, we shall not only set up a potent guarantee that white men shall not sink into equality with the black, we shall also train our sons, and those of the commoners as well, to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by industrial growth and its commercial consequences, and so to make the land richer still.³³

For Cash, the post-bellum New South dream represented few significant departures from the antebellum mind set. A central aim in the establishment of public schools was "the old racist

³³ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1941) p. 79-80.

desire to keep whites and blacks in their separate places.”³⁴ In Cash’s interpretation, the southern mind was “fundamentally continuous with the past.”³⁵ As long as the maintenance of racial oppression and racial division remained a fundamental purpose of the public schools, the South would remain strongly committed to public education. Once the Supreme Court overturned the 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which stated that segregated facilities were not a violation of the 14th Amendment if the facilities were equal, the true feelings of white southerners about the role of education were revealed in the fervor with which they resisted desegregation efforts throughout the 1960s.

Because he asks different questions of the data and gives agency to the post-Civil War African American community, James Anderson’s work on the role of former slaves in the establishment of universal education in the South revises Cash’s traditional view that public schools were designed by and for wealthy whites. Anderson’s book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*, argues convincingly that the impetus for public education largely arose from the demands of the freed slaves who saw schooling as the road to self-sufficiency and, therefore, equality. The goal of the freedmen’s education movement, according to Anderson, was the establishment of schools both controlled and sustained by the freed slave community itself.³⁶ Unlike the northeastern United States, the South had few traditions of free public schooling; however, by 1870, largely because of sustained pressure by former slaves in Reconstruction state

³⁴ Margaret Gladney, “I’ll Take My Stand: The Southern Segregation Academy Movement” (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico 1974) p. 8.

³⁵ Cash, p. x.

³⁶ James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1988) p. 5.

governments, every southern state's constitution provided for the establishment of publicly financed school systems.

Despite this well-documented revision of the historical roots of southern education, Anderson's study supports Cash's thesis. Like Cash, Anderson claims that, from its inception, public education was a tool used by wealthy whites to maintain white supremacy and social control. After 1877, propertied whites realized that mass education represented a threat to the basic tenets of white supremacy and social control. Recognizing their inability to halt the spread of mass education, property-owning whites chose instead to control the curriculum and the running of schools. Once in control, this propertied class introduced industrial education to the curriculum and directed it toward the African American schools and the African American teachers. Similar to what would happen in the South during school desegregation, following Reconstruction, the politically powerful, wealthy whites used the schools as a tool for perpetuating both the color line and the social order in which the former planters maintained control. What Anderson's work adds to the story of segregated education and the unbalanced power structure within that educational system is the picture of an African American community actively involved in the struggle to gain schooling for its children.

In the 1950s and 1960s, almost one hundred years following Reconstruction, the same class of elite whites continued to control the course of public schooling in the South. When these southern white elites' vision of public schooling came under attack following the *Brown* decision, white southerners responded with an intense battle to maintain their separate school systems. The massive resistance with which both wealthy and working class whites met the prospect of school integration has been examined by a number of political and social historians

who plotted the course of massive resistance as played out in the federal courts, in the state legislatures, and in the violent conflicts such as occurred in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1957.

Recognized, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as one of the most notable and prolific writers on the political, economic, and legal developments in the South during years of massive resistance, Numan Bartley's work on the early years of southern desegregation, *Massive Resistance*, tells the story of a South willing to close its schools and suffer social and economic setbacks rather than obey court-ordered desegregation rulings. Focusing on the political power structure in the South from 1954 to 1961, Bartley sees the efforts of massive resistance as an attempt by the southern "old guard"—the white political power brokers—to maintain the old political power structure that was at once white, Democratic, and rural. The agreement, after 1961, to accept moderate integration concessions is, for Bartley, a sign of a larger political changing of the guard. As he later asserts in his book, *New South*, the movement toward acceptance of desegregation was led by a new urban and business elite concerned primarily with economic growth rather than with maintenance of an Old South whose unique society rested in *de jure* white supremacy and rural-oriented ruling white elite.³⁷

In 1961, many southern states, including Georgia, relinquished their pledges of massive resistance and allowed nominal school integration. Bartley characterized this nominal school integration as "token desegregation" that was less a break with the past than a "conservative reaction in defense of southern continuity."³⁸ Faced with the prospect of closing schools and

³⁷ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, v. XI, *A History of the South*, eds. Wendell H. Stephenson and E. Merton Coulter (Louisiana State University Press; Littlefield Fund for Southern History, The University of Texas 1995) p. 460-461.

³⁸ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1969) p. 343.

jeopardizing the academic and economic futures of their sons and daughters, white southerners chose to accept limited segregation rather than interrupt the lifestyles to which they had grown accustomed. In Bartley's estimation, then, the eventual efforts to desegregate not only were minimal, but also grew from a desire for "social stability" rather than from "social change."³⁹ Although Bartley's work is well documented and highly critical, his findings reinforce Cash's earlier assessment of southern society. Instead of modernizing—either socially or politically—the South continued to march "away from the present to the past."⁴⁰ What Bartley failed to address, however, is the concept of whiteness as the glue that held together the present and the past to which southern whites were marching.

A more recent study of the movement from massive resistance to "token" desegregation concurs with much of Bartley's assessment of the meaning of this shift in southern politics and southern race relations. In his work, *Restructured Resistance*, Jeff Roche examines the work of Georgia's Sibley Commission as it toured the state in the early 1960s gathering the testimony of Georgia voters about the issue of school desegregation and school closing. Roche's research centers on the political maneuvering of John Sibley and his orchestration of the commission's work in a direction that steered Georgia's white electorate away from the road of massive resistance toward a path of nominal desegregation. Though a segregationist at heart, Sibley understood that the decision to avoid desegregation at all costs spelled disaster for Georgia's economic modernization. Sibley and his modernizing supporters believed a decision to allow token integration without closing schools across the state would protect both Georgia's national

³⁹ *Massive Resistance*, p. 343.

⁴⁰ Cash, p. x.

reputation and its predominantly segregated public school system. Like Bartley, Roche tells the story of how one southern state devised an educational policy that accommodated the two opposing loyalties of the newly emerging suburban middle class—segregation and economic modernization.

Roche further argues that this shift in school policy from massive resistance to “restructured resistance” was less indicative of a shift in racial attitudes among either Georgia’s political leaders or its white electorate than an indication of a shift in Georgia’s white political power structure from the rural agricultural elite to the urban and suburban white business elites. The irony for Georgia, as well as for most other southern states, was that the decision to end complete resistance to school integration was led by men who were themselves segregationists. Roche points to Governor Carl Sanders, elected in 1962 as an economically progressive candidate, as one of the best examples of this new pragmatic, forward-thinking approach to desegregation. Speaking to a crowd of Georgia voters during the course of his campaign, Sanders conceded, “I am a segregationist, but not a damned fool.”⁴¹

Not all historical accounts of white southern reaction to school desegregation are consistent with either Bartley’s or Roche’s, however. Elizabeth Jacoway refutes Bartley’s assertion that the end of massive resistance represented a primarily conservative response. According to Jacoway, when measured against the record of the past, the desegregation of southern schools represented a significant change.⁴² Jacoway claims that, by accepting a role as

⁴¹ Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1998).

⁴² Elizabeth Jacoway, “An Introduction,” In *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation*, eds. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1982) p. 2.

“active agents of change” in the struggle over school desegregation, white southern businessmen, while clinging to their traditional racial prejudices, exhibited a “fundamental reordering of their priorities.”⁴³ These white business leaders placed the potential for economic growth above the desires for white supremacy. Unlike James W. Ely, who characterized the measured response of southern leaders as a mere “façade” by which a more subtle form of resistance and white supremacy was maintained,⁴⁴ Jacoway views even limited acquiescence to desegregation as a conscious choice by some white southern leaders to abandon not traditional racial oppression, but traditional racial patterns and the old “southern way of life.”⁴⁵

Jacoway’s analysis of the responses of white business leaders to desegregation fails to examine either the business leadership in rural Piedmont or mountain regions of Georgia—the areas of the state that, in the early 1960s, maintained considerable political control—or the actual effects of the minimal changes on school desegregation. These omissions weaken Jacoway’s argument because without this information it is difficult to assess either the motives of white southern business and political leaders or the degree to which racial patterns and racial politics in Georgia and other southern states actually changed after 1961.

A number of historical works in the past decade have addressed the omissions of Jacoway and others who failed to examine the actual impact of desegregation on southern schools and schoolchildren.⁴⁶ With the luxury of writing thirty years after the struggle over desegregation

⁴³ Jacoway, p. 7.

⁴⁴ James W. Ely, *The Crisis Of Conservative Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1976) p. 132.

⁴⁵ Jacoway, p. 7.

⁴⁶ Examples include Bryan Deever, “Desegregation in a Southern School System, 1968-1974: Power/Resistance and the Discourse of Exclusion,” *Journal of Education* 174, p. 66-88.; Thomas O’Brien, *Georgia’s Response to Brown v. Board of Education: The Rise and Fall of Massive Resistance, 1949-1961*, paper presented at the Annual Meeting

began, these historians are better able to examine the lasting impact of desegregation policy to determine if the concessions of the 1960s represented a true break with the traditional southern racial mindset. As such, Thomas O'Brien refutes both Bartley's assertion that the end of massive resistance ushered in an era of "passive resistance," as well as Jacoway's rather optimistic appraisal that even the most limited movements toward desegregation represented a significant awakening in the minds of southern whites. Taking something of a middle ground, O'Brien argues that the fall of massive resistance in Georgia represented a significant legal shift proceeding from both Georgia's African American community and its community of moderate whites. The significant legal changes brought on by the erosion of grass roots support for massive resistance were evidence of the state-level political machine's movement away from open support of white supremacist ideology.⁴⁷ To assert that this legal shift was tantamount to a fundamental awakening in southern white thinking about race and white supremacy is, for O'Brien, unfounded.

Like many of the other historians who examine the political and legal maneuvering that surrounded the issue of school desegregation in the South, O'Brien accepts the idea that nearly all groups of white southerners—rich or poor, rural, suburban, or urban—were convinced that separate schooling for the races was desirable. By focusing on the changes in school policy without examining the reasons for the fundamental consensus among whites on the issue of separate schooling, these works ignore many of the issues of racial identity and power

of the American Education Research Association, April 1993, ERIC, ED 360 454.; Joseph DiBona, "The Resegregation of Schools in Small Town and Rural Areas of North Carolina," *Journal of Negro Education* 57 (Winter 1988) p. 43-50.; Robert A. Pratt, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia, 1954-1989* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1992).

⁴⁷ O'Brien, p. 22.

distribution embedded within the struggle over school desegregation. Deever's study of school desegregation in rural Bulloch County, Georgia, represents one of the few efforts to fill this gap in the historical literature. By extending the study of desegregation beyond the early sixties, Deever focuses on the issues of power involved in desegregation efforts. Drawing on Foucault, he proposes that the existence of power in social relations is constant, but its application is not.⁴⁸ Within this framework, Deever argues that, despite nominal school desegregation, the schools in Bulloch County remained, even after legal desegregation, largely segregated institutions. This *de facto* segregation emerged primarily from two sources: tracking policies within the schools that targeted African American children for the vocational, non-college preparatory track; and the founding of an all-white academy that helped maintain segregated schooling similar to that extant in 1954. Because white community leaders failed to relinquish their "relational dominance" in the schools and the community, they were able simply to alter how that dominance was "articulated" rather than relinquish the dominance itself.⁴⁹ Despite court-ordered desegregation plans, the power structure in many rural Georgia counties remained intact at the end of the 1960s and remains that way today.⁵⁰ Though the power structure within school systems has remained constant, the pathways through which that power is wielded has changed.

By concentrating on the effects of desegregation in Bulloch County, Georgia, Deever's study joins those of a number of recent historians who focus on single communities to better understand the issues involved in the continuing struggle over desegregation in southern school

⁴⁸ "Desegregation in a Southern School System," p. 66.

⁴⁹ "Desegregation in a Southern School System," p. 79.

⁵⁰ For Evidence of contemporary *de facto* segregation see: Deever, "Living *Plessy* in the Context of *Brown*."

districts. The work of these historians is significant because it addresses the re-segregation characteristic of schools across the South. Among the most significant of these community studies is Robert Pratt's examination of the desegregation, and later re-segregation, of schools in Richmond, Virginia. Pratt found that the schools in Richmond, not unlike those schools studied by Deever in rural Georgia, followed a pattern of massive resistance, legal desegregation, and gradual re-segregation. In Richmond, this re-segregation was accomplished through a course of actions by the local school board and local white residents that allowed the schools in suburban Richmond to become the "white" schools, while the schools in the city of Richmond became the "black" schools. In the end, Pratt concludes, desegregation failed because it was never embraced by members of the white community as an asset either to the social, or the economic, health of the Richmond community. White parents ended their extreme resistance to desegregation, not because they favored shared schooling for African American and white children, but because they were opposed to closing the schools—the only alternative to disregarding court-ordered desegregation laws. Pratt's findings reaffirm those of Bartley, Roche, and Deever, that the power structure within the South remained intact even after desegregation was forced on southern school districts. The whites in Richmond never abandoned their belief in separate schooling for the races; they simply found a new method of guaranteeing this segregated schooling.

What is missing in Pratt's work, as in the works of many historians concerned with school desegregation is an attempt to understand the motives behind the southern white community's continued desire for segregated schooling for white and black children. Whiteness research suggests that, rather than asking Bartley's, Roche's, and Jacoway's questions of what political power shifts are indicated by the end of massive resistance, scholars should proceed toward an examination of the role played by racial privilege and racial identity embedded within

the struggle over integrated schooling. A shift in this direction requires the researcher to deal directly with, not only issues of economic and political power, but also issues of race. In this sense, then, the research into southern school desegregation would benefit from the use of whiteness as a lens through which to view the attitudes, rhetoric, and actions of the members of the white community who fought, and continue to fight, to maintain separate schooling for their children. The focus of such a study necessarily shifts from the political effects of the dominant class's desire for maintenance of a segregated school system, to the core values responsible for this desire.

Not only do the questions asked by whiteness researchers provide a new perspective into school desegregation in the South, but also the use of these questions about southern school desegregation expands the whiteness research itself to bring it into a more contemporary and a more southern setting. In this way, the concepts proposed by theorists such as Roediger, Ignatiev, and Allen serve as a framework for this historical study of school desegregation in Chattooga County, Georgia. By applying the theories of whiteness to one rural southern county's struggle over desegregation and looking at the issue of desegregation through the eyes of the white community, this study will begin to uncover the motives behind the white southerners' fight to maintain school segregation by looking at the issue of desegregation through the eyes of the white community. What were southern whites fighting desperately to protect? Were they more concerned with the quality of education, with, as Myrdal suggests, "race mixing," with fear of the unknown, or with protection of white privilege?

Works like Bartley's and Roche's conclude that the South's gradual acceptance of school desegregation was rooted in the belief that token desegregation provided a solution by which the South could continue along the road to economic modernization while maintaining its largely

segregated public schools. Whiteness research accepts this conclusion, but also focuses on a different set of questions—questions about why politicians and working class white people alike worked to protect a segregated system of schooling. What was the source of the white community’s desire for segregated schools? For the whiteness researchers, then, the questions center on what the fight for school segregation indicates about white southern attitudes toward race and race identity. What do the reactions of the white community during the struggle over desegregation reveal about the white southerner’s definition of what it means to be “white,” and what it means to be “black.” Are segregated schools a continuation of Du Bois’s “psychological wage” of whiteness? As suggested by Hale, is segregated schooling a continuation of the white community’s definition of what it means to be black as someone who sits in an inferior classroom? Answers to these questions begin to unfold through this examination of a specific southern white community’s experiences with race and school desegregation.

One of the few historians to tackle directly the issue of race and social class in a more contemporary setting is Dan Carter in his work, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1996*.⁵¹ Although he never refers to his study as one of whiteness, his questions about the changes in the national political climate in this thirty year time span are similar to those asked by researchers of whiteness. Beginning with the presidential campaign of George Wallace, Carter demonstrates how national politicians tied together issues of racial integration and issues of crime and moral decay. More specifically, Carter examines the rhetoric of white politicians in relation to white voters in both northern and southern working class neighborhoods to show the deliberate use of language to play on the racial fears of whites

⁵¹ Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1996).

in economically insecure communities. The value of Carter's work for historians of school desegregation rests in both his methodology—the study of public rhetoric as a compared with private communications—and his focus on the relationship among race, social class, and political power. As such, his work supports that of Allen and other researchers of the historical evolution of whiteness. Like these researchers, Carter views the politics of race as a tool used by powerful whites to drive a wedge between members of the working classes through the creation of a distinct color line.

This study of the struggle over school desegregation within the white community of Chattooga County, Georgia, deals directly with the role of racial privilege and racial identity in the struggle over school desegregation. Like Allen's study of whiteness, it asks the people of rural Georgia, and more specifically of rural Appalachian Chattooga County, to explain the source of their resistance to school integration and racial mixing. What was it that community and school leaders hoped to protect? To address this question the study looks at desegregation in this rural mountain county through the eyes of the white schoolchild, the child's parent, and the white leaders. Alongside the well-documented story of the shifts in political and economic clout within the elite white community during the years of struggle over desegregation, the story of Chattooga County's experiences with desegregation adds to the larger evolving story of the desegregation movement that, rather than transforming the schools of the South into a racially integrated system, continues to perpetuate a system of separation and segregation within southern society.

CHAPTER 2

CHATTOOGA COUNTY, GEORGIA, 1960-1980 AND TODAY

No point in history, no historical event occurs in isolation. To better understand the events surrounding school desegregation in Chattooga County, Georgia, it is essential first to place this county in the wider context of time and place. The historical and social context of these people and of this place played a large role in shaping the community's reaction to school desegregation in the 1960s. Because events surrounding desegregation did not happen in isolation, they must be viewed in light of the social and economic forces at work within both the African American and white communities in this county. In addition to understanding the history of the county and its people, a complete portrait of Chattooga County must also include the physical geography that has helped shape the county both economically and socially. Who are the people of Chattooga County? What is the county's social, economic, and racial makeup? What geographic and historical forces have helped shape this county, its people, and its views toward race and education? This chapter attempts to answer these questions through both a geographic and historical analysis of this largely Appalachian county, as well as a look at the social and economic conditions that have evolved in the county following school desegregation. For organizational purposes, the chapter first examines the geographic location and the demographic profile of Chattooga County, Summerville—the county seat town, and Trion—the center of the county's independent school system. After creating a sense of the place and the people that are the focus of this study, the chapter creates an historical picture of the Chattooga County, Summerville, and Trion during and immediately following the years of school

desegregation. Because the schools of the county are at the center of this story of white identity and its role in school desegregation, the following chapter examines historic development of the two school systems in Chattooga County, and how the development of these two systems is both separate and intertwined.

Following this story of the historical development of the white and black schools of Chattooga County and Trion City Systems, chapter four examines the state and regional context in which Chattooga County's two school systems operated during the years of forced school desegregation. The chapter examines the rhetoric of state and regional leaders as they struggled with the controversy of school desegregation. The final chapters of the study focus again on Chattooga County, the race relations within the County both before and during the years of school desegregation, and the county's experiences with and reactions to school desegregation. Using local newspapers, school documents, and interviews, these chapters portray Chattooga County's unique experience with school desegregation and what the white community's response to this challenge to their segregated society reveals about white racial identity, or whiteness, as played out in this specific time and place.



Figure 1¹

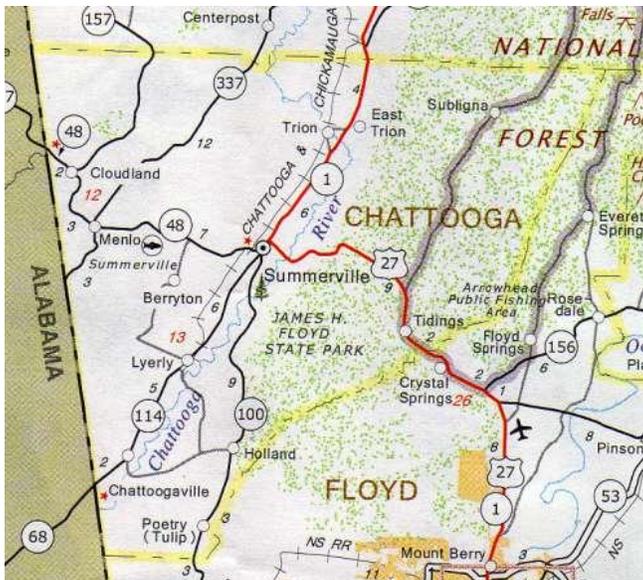


Figure 2²

Geographic and Demographic Description of Chattooga County

Chattooga County is located in the northwestern corner of Georgia about 120 miles northwest of Atlanta, 60 miles southwest of Chattanooga, Tennessee, and almost 120 miles east

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chattooga_County,_Georgia. Map shows the location of Chattooga County in relation to other counties in Georgia.

² <http://www.2havefun.com/georgia/maps/chattoogacounty.shtml>. This map shows the major cities and roads in the county and includes national forest and state park areas. It gives a good sense of the location of Trion, Menlo, and Lyerly, in relation to the county seat of Summerville.

of Birmingham, Alabama. The county seat, Summerville, has a population of 4,556 people. Other incorporated cities in the county include Lyerly, Menlo, and Trion. The county is bounded to the south by Floyd County, home to Rome, Georgia, an economic, medical, and educational center with a population of almost 100,000 in 2010, 40,000 of whom live in the county seat of Rome. Home to two large regional hospitals and three major colleges—privately operated Berry College and Shorter College, along with Georgia Highlands, a two-year institution that is part of the university system of Georgia—Rome is a major source for entertainment, employment, shopping, and higher education for the residents of Chattooga County and the surrounding areas.³

Geographically situated in the state’s ridge and valley region, Chattooga County’s most outstanding natural feature is Lookout Mountain which bounds the county to its north and east. The mountain stands as a natural barrier between Chattooga County and Cherokee and Dekalb Counties in Alabama. On the southern side of the county lies a smaller ridge system dominated by Taylor’s Ridge. Although some rural areas of the county, such as Gore and Subligna, lie south and west of this ridge system, the majority of the county and its residents live within the valley that lies between Lookout Mountain and Taylor’s Ridge. In part, this geographic isolation has helped contribute to the economic isolation that continues to shape the county and its residents today.

In 2010, Chattooga County had a population of 26,015, a 2.1% increase from the 2000 Census. The 2010 Census also found the county’s median household income was \$33,342 as compared to the state median income of \$47, 469. The per capita income was \$15,079 compared

³ U.S. Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, Chattooga County, Georgia, 2010. U.S. Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, Floyd County, Georgia, 2010.

to a state median income of \$25,000, and the percent of citizens living below the poverty line was 19.9% in 2010 which is 3.5% higher than the state average, and 6.1% higher the nation as a whole.⁴

Because of its location at the base of Lookout Mountain, Chattooga County is considered part of the 205,000 square-mile Appalachian region as defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC). Like many other counties in this region, Chattooga County is more rural (56% rural population, and 44% urban) and more economically at-risk than the majority of areas in the nation. Economic conditions in Chattooga County, worse than those in all other Appalachian counties in the state, led the ARC to label it a “distressed” county. This designation is based on the high poverty rate and the per capita and median family incomes that are considerably lower than those in the nation as a whole. In fact, Chattooga County’s per capita income was 54.3% of the nation’s average, the lowest rate of any county in the Appalachian region of Georgia. While many areas of Georgia’s Appalachian region, like much of Appalachia as a whole, have diversified their economies and gained some economic stability, Chattooga County continues to struggle to attract business or industry to the area, leading to its high poverty level and consistently high unemployment rate that hovers around 13%, at least four percentage points higher than that of the nation and state as a whole.⁵

Like many other counties in Appalachia, the major source of employment in Chattooga County is manufacturing—in particular, textile or apparel, and carpet manufacturing. In total, 22

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, State and County Quick Facts, Chattooga County, Georgia, 2010.

⁵ Appalachian Regional Commission, “Socioeconomic Data, Chattooga County, Georgia.” 2010.

manufacturing firms provide 3502 jobs within the county.⁶ The top employers in the region, according to the Chattooga County Chamber of Commerce, are Mount Vernon Mills, a denim mill in Trion; Mohawk Industries, a carpet manufacturer with plants in both Summerville and Lyerly; the Chattooga County Board of Education; Hays State Prison; and Best Manufacturing, a glove mill in Menlo. Agriculture in 2007 comprised a much smaller part of the county's income with the average value of agricultural products per farm listed at just over \$17,000.⁷

Education in Chattooga County Today

Not surprisingly, Chattooga County's stunted economic progress is often mirrored by a somewhat equally stunted growth in education. Whereas the percent of high school graduates in the county's population has increased from 34.3% in 1980 to 68.6% in 2010, that figure is still only 75% of the U.S. average. Like the county's income levels, the high school graduation rate is the lowest of all counties in Georgia's Appalachian region. Similarly, at 8%, the percentage of county residents with a bachelor's degree is lower than all but one county in Georgia's Appalachian region and is only 31% of the rate for the nation as a whole. These figures, indicative of the overall economic and educational condition of the county, are a reflection of an area in distress. Although the cause and effect of the educational and economic condition are impossible to separate, it is evident that the economic fragility of the region both impedes, and is impeded by, the educational progress in the public schools of the county.⁸

There are two school systems in the county—Chattooga County and Trion City Schools. The Chattooga County School System is comprised of one primary school (grades K-3), one

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, "Selected Economic Facts," 2010.

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, "Manufacturing: Geographic Area Series: Industry Statistics for the State, Metropolitan, and Micropolitan Statistical Areas, Counties, and Places: 2007," 2007 Economic Census.

⁸ Appalachian Regional Commission, "Socioeconomic Data: Chattooga County, Georgia," 2010

upper elementary school (grades 4-5), a middle school (grades 6-8), and a single comprehensive high school. In addition, the system includes two schools, Menlo and Lyerly, that serve kindergarten through 8th grade students. The Trion City School System is housed on a single campus with an elementary, a middle, and a high school. The total school enrollment in the county system is 2,732 students, and the school system employs 248 teachers, administrators, and support personnel. In the 2009-2010 school year, all but 7 school employees were white. The 2009-2010 student body in Chattooga County was 80% white, 10% African American, and 5% Hispanic. Regarding compensatory programs, only 1% of Chattooga County School's students were enrolled in ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages), and 13.6% of the students were enrolled in special education programs. In addition, 77% of all students enrolled in the county system qualified for free or reduced lunch including 69% of all high school students and 91% of all students enrolled at Summerville Elementary.

An examination of the second school system in the county, Trion City Schools, reveals a contrasting picture both demographically and academically. The Trion Schools, originally organized as a school for the employees of the former Trion Mills, currently Mount Vernon Mills, educates children from across Chattooga County. A large portion of the school population is comprised of students who live within the county's district lines, but pay a minimal tuition of \$150 to attend the independent school district of Trion. Although the population in the town of Trion, according to the 2010 Census, was just over 1800 with 30.3% of that population under the age of 18, school enrollment in Trion is more than 1300. Additionally, the Census records the racial breakdown of Trion's population as 76% white, 21% Hispanic, and just over 2% African American. The school population, however, is 89% white, 9% Hispanic, and 1% African American. In contrast to Chattooga County Schools, the number of students enrolled in special

education programs is only 9.1%, while just over 3% of the system’s students are enrolled in ESOL programs. In addition, although the percentage of Trion Elementary students who receive free and reduced price lunch grew to 45% in the 2009-2010 school year, the percentage enrolled in the free and reduced lunch program at the high school, at 25%, was well below the 69% enrolled at Chattooga High School. Finally, the Trion School System employs 112 persons, all of whom are white.

Table 1. Demographic Data Chattooga County and Trion City Schools, 2009-2010

School System	White	African American	Hispanic	Free/Reduced Lunch
Chattooga	80%	10%	5%	77%
Trion	89%	1%	9%	30%

Although the demographic information contained in the preceding chart and text provide some indication of the contrasts between the two school systems in Chattooga County, the differences are more evident in a comparison of high school graduation test scores and high school graduation rates. Table 2 shows dropout rates and the percentage of students who failed to pass the graduation tests in each of the four academic areas for both Chattooga County Schools and Trion City Schools. For the past three years, Chattooga County has not met Average Yearly Progress (AYP) based on test scores on CRCT and Graduation Tests. The Trion School System, however, has never failed to meet AYP and is consistently chosen as a Blue Ribbon, or exemplary school system.

Table 2. Percent of Students Failing Graduation Tests, 2009-2010

	<u>Chattooga High School</u>	<u>Trion High School</u>
Language Arts	14%	1%
Math	10%	1%
Science	12%	1%
Social Studies	24%	2%

Similar to the contrast in high school test scores shown in Table 2, a comparison of the graduation rates and performance on the SAT indicates a discrepancy between the academic achievements of the two student bodies. In Chattooga County Schools, the graduation rate for 2009-2010 was 77.3%, up from just under 68% in the 2007-2008 school year. By contrast, the graduation rate for Trion Schools in 2009-2010 was almost 96.6%, up from just over 93% in the 2007-2008 school year. A comparison of SAT scores shows that the 23 Trion High School students who took the test scored a composite average of 1662 compared with an average score of 1350 for the 49 Chattooga High School students who took the test.⁹

Table 3. Graduation Rates and SAT Scores Chattooga County and Trion City Schools, 2009-2010

<u>School System</u>	<u>Graduation Rate</u>	<u>Average SAT Scores</u>
Chattooga County	77.3%	1350
Trion City	93%	1662

This comparison of both demographic composition and testing performance shows a large discrepancy between the academic achievement of students in the Trion system and that of students in the Chattooga County schools. In part, this study of the desegregation of schools in Chattooga County seeks to uncover the forces behind the demographic and academic contrasts that emerged between two systems that, though geographically intertwined, are academically and socially distinct. A brief examination of the history of Chattooga County and its schools in general, as well as the history of these two school systems in particular, provides clues into the divergent paths of the two neighboring school systems.

⁹ Georgia Department of Education, "Report Card, 2009-2010," Chattooga County; Georgia Department of Education, "Report Card, 2009-2010," Trion City Schools.

A Brief History of Chattooga County

Although the Cherokee had inhabited areas of what is today Chattooga County for hundreds of years, the settlement of the area by whites began in the 1830s when the land was sold as part of the Cherokee Land Lottery, the system used in Georgia to redistribute lands taken from the Cherokee and given to white males in the state.¹⁰ In the lottery, eligible white male Georgians who applied had their names written on pieces of paper that were placed in a large drum. In a second drum were listed available lots of land. The assignment of land was determined by drawing a name from one drum and a corresponding lot from the other drum. Through the land lottery, common Georgians could amass large land holdings in the western portions of the state for around seven cents an acre.

The white settler who is credited with organizing and creating Chattooga County, John Beavers, moved to the southern area of Walker County from Campbell County, Georgia. Of the 1,258 lots in the Cherokee Land Lottery that were located in, or partially in, present-day Chattooga County, only three of the successful drawers are known to have settled in the region.¹¹ As more settlers moved in to the southern region of Walker County, it became increasingly difficult for settlers in the most distant areas of the county to travel to the county seat town of Lafayette to transact business. To alleviate this problem, the Georgia legislature, in 1838, created Chattooga County from the southern-most portion of Walker County and the northern-most

¹⁰ The Cherokee who originally populated this region of Northwest Georgia were forced from their land and sent to holding cells in current day Lafayette, Georgia, before being forced to move to reservations in Oklahoma on what is referred to as the Trail of Tears.

¹¹ Baker, Robert S., *Chattooga: The Story of a County and Its People*, (Wolfe Publishing Co., Fernandina Beach, FL), 1988, p. 36.

portion of Floyd County.¹² This same act of the General Assembly gave the Justices of the Inferior Court of Chattooga County power to purchase land for use as the county seat. On March 23, 1839, 90 acres were purchased from Mr. John Beavers for \$1800 for this purpose. Originally named Selma, Georgia, the county seat town became known as Summerville after March of 1840 when the name of the post office was officially changed.¹³

The lots in Chattooga County and Summerville failed to sell rapidly at first. Therefore, the Justices of the Inferior Court advertised in a number of Georgia newspapers to interest Georgians in the land in the county. An advertisement placed in *The Columbus Enquirer*, in Columbus, Georgia, describes Chattooga County as follows.

People of all nations, of all religious denominations, and of all occupations. You are hereby respectfully invited to attend a sale on the 23rd day of July next, at 11 o'clock in the forenoon, of the lots of the new town of Summerville, Chattooga County, Georgia. This town is situate[d] on a gently undulating piece of ground in the enchanting valley of Chattooga River, on its western bank, having Taylor's extensive ridge of mountains, in beautiful prospect to the East, and lofty spurs of the Lookout mountain to the West. Immediately at the northwest end of the Town, is a beautiful blue limestone spring, issuing several hogsheads of the most limpid water per minute, and upon the northeastern part of the town, several other fountains are to be found, which have never ceased to issue pure and limpid water. ... A Seminary of high order, for the education of females, is about being established in the vicinity of this place and the earliest attention will be given to the establishment of a male academy. ... Cotton, small grain and silk, will be the staples of this county and believe him not, who will tell you, that the Georgia mountain valleys will not produce as much cotton per acre, as the best lands in Morgan, Green, Jefferson, or Burke counties.¹⁴

¹² Georgia General Assembly, Georgia Senate Bill 31, December 7, 1838.

¹³ Baker, p. 49-51.

¹⁴ *The Columbus Enquirer*, May 22, 1839.

The description, intended to bring farmers and merchants to the county, met with little success, and Chattooga County continued in its struggle to attract settlers to the area. Eventually, however, settlers trickled into the area, and by the 1850s, Summerville could boast a number of business establishments, including two hotels, a race track, a cemetery, three churches, a tannery, a shoe shop, and a hatter's shop.

The early white settlers primarily were transplants from other counties across Georgia or were from the Carolinas, Virginia, and Tennessee. Although a few of these settlers bought and farmed large tracts of land, most were small farmers who either operated the farms as a family, or with the help of only a few slaves.¹⁵ In fact, Chattooga County was never a big slave-holding county. This is due in part to the majority of the settlers being poor, but also because the land, like most land in the northern part of the state, did not lend itself to plantation agriculture—despite the claim in the newspaper. The U.S. Census shows that there were 814 African American slaves in Chattooga County in 1840 and 3,438 free whites. Similar to the growth in slave populations in other areas across the Southeast, the 1860 Census shows that the slave population in Chattooga County, at 2,062, had increased in the decade leading to the Civil War. In addition, the Census showed a few freed African Americans living and working in the county.¹⁶ Although the use of slave labor in Chattooga County increased in the years preceding the Civil War, most farmers continued to rely on family and free tenant farmers to produce crops. This practice became even more prevalent following the Civil War as Chattooga County's economy grew increasingly dependent on either small farming or textile manufacturing.

¹⁵ Baker, p. 209.

¹⁶ U.S. Census, "Selected Demographics," 1840; U.S. Census, 1860.

Following the Civil War, Chattooga County farmers began to diversify their crops with the introduction of fruit crops including peaches and apples. Although the peach crops yielded fewer profits by the early 1900s, fruit cultivation remained a major source of income for the county. In addition to peaches, strawberries became a significant source of agricultural income in the late 1890s. In particular, strawberries became a major crop in and around the hills of Menlo, in the northwestern areas of Chattooga County. Daily, these berries were shipped by rail from the farms of the county to Chattanooga, Tennessee, on the “Berry Special.” Even though the strawberry business largely had disappeared by the 1930s, it was responsible for as much as \$25,000 a year to the county’s income during the 1920s.¹⁷

Despite these endeavors in the fruit industry, cotton continued to dominate the agriculture of Chattooga County until the invasion of the boll weevil in the 1930s. In addition to these crops, farmers in Chattooga County also turned more and more to the growing of livestock and poultry. Furthermore, much land in Chattooga was dedicated to the pulpwood industry, which continues to have a presence in the county today. For short periods in Chattooga’s history, various mining enterprises were attempted including the extraction of iron ore on Taylor’s Ridge, coal mining atop Lookout Mountain, marble quarrying, and chert mining. However, none of these mining projects were long lived.

Perhaps the greatest addition to the social and economic fabric of the county was the establishment of the Trion Manufacturing Company. It is the one contributor to the county’s economy that has remained in operation from 1847 to the present. In its early years, the mill not only provided jobs for the residents of the county, but it also provided a market for the numerous

¹⁷ Baker, p. 227-228.

cotton producers throughout the county, and it helped make cotton the mainstay of the area's agricultural sector.

The original owner of the mill, Andrew P. Allgood, from South Carolina chose the site in Trion because of its location on the Chattooga River about ten miles south of LaFayette in Walker County, Georgia. Using the pattern of most cotton mills in the Southeast, Allgood and his business partners, Spencer Marsh and Col. W.K. Briers, designed and built a mill village around the area of the mill that included a company store, a hospital, and also a school for the mill workers' children.¹⁸ Built less than twenty years prior to the Civil War, the mill was spared by Sherman as he marched from Chickamauga through Chattooga County to Atlanta. Largely, this was because, as Allgood admitted during his testimony in a trial on the burning of a cotton mill on Sweetwater Creek outside Atlanta, he was a Union sympathizer. As recorded in the testimony, Allgood stated the following.

When General Sherman passed our place in October 1864 he stayed all night with me and next morning gave me protection papers. General O.O. Howard sent a large guard to the factory to protect all property there and showed no disposition to destroy any of our property except provisions. I took extra pains to let the Union men of the county know my status or position and rendered them all the aid I could when they were in trouble and was known as a Union man.¹⁹

Although Allgood's Union sympathies resulted in an unsuccessful attempt on his life, as well as the complete destruction of the mill by fire ten years after the Civil War ended, his efforts to save the mill eventually helped the returning Confederate soldiers who had a place to work once the war was over. The success of the mill is evidenced in Allgood's testimony in which he revealed

¹⁸ Brantley, Sarah McNeil, "Covington Mills: Perceptions of Life in a Southern Mill Village," (University of Georgia, Master's Thesis, 1995).

¹⁹ Testimony of A. P. Allgood, Trial of burning of Sweetwater Creek Mill, June 11, 1869.

that by 1869 the mill produced 5,000 pounds of yarn and 15,000 pounds of cloth per week and that the capital stock of the company had increased to \$100,000.²⁰

Despite the early successes of the Trion Manufacturing Company, downturns in the national economy eventually led to financial woes for the mill and its owners. When the mill declared bankruptcy in the 1912, its assets were bought by Mr. B.D. Riegel of New York. Eventually, the name of the mill was changed to Riegel Manufacturing. After acquiring the mill, Mr. Riegel initiated community improvements for the workers of the village including the building of a modern department store—the “Big Easy,” the construction of a Y.M.C.A., the remodeling of the Opera House, and the establishment of a 30-bed hospital. In addition, the mill provided most of the tax revenue and other special funding for the Trion City School System. Although a public school had existed in Trion since the 1840s, the city has operated an independent school system since June of 1895 when the Georgia General Assembly granted its independent status. Prior to that time the schools were part of the larger Chattooga County School System. By the 1960s, when school desegregation was implemented in Trion Schools and in Chattooga County Schools, Riegel Textile Mill was the largest employer in Chattooga County. Although the mill was sold to Mount Vernon Mills in the 1980s, it remains the number one employer in the county today.

Along with the Riegel Mills in Trion, a number of other mills operating in the county helped make textile manufacturing the main source of jobs and revenue throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The Census figures for 1960 show that 59.9% of all laborers in Chattooga County were employed in manufacturing in general, and textile manufacturing in particular. By 1970,

²⁰ Baker, p.

over 65% of all those employed in the county were working in textile manufacturing.²¹ Among the most economically successful of these mills was the Berryton yarn mill. Berryton Mills, established in 1909 on the grounds of the former Raccoon Mill, was located west of Summerville, between the county seat and Lyerly. Soon after the mill was established by Mr. John M. Berry, the Berryton community sprang up. Homes for employees were constructed by the mill, along with churches, a general store, dairy farms, a dairy, and a post office. In January of 1958, Berryton Mills was acquired by Harriett and Henderson Corporation of Henderson, N.C. According to company reports the mill, in 1960, consumed 12,000 bales of cotton each year and employed around 150 workers with an annual payroll of \$416,000. Although the general store and the post office still remained in 1960, the company had sold all its houses and its farmland to private individuals in 1957.²²

The other major manufacturers during the 1960s, as listed in the *Summerville News* in September of 1960, included Summerville Manufacturing Company and Montgomery Knitting Company, both located in Summerville; the Georgia Rug Mill, with plants in both Summerville and Lyerly; Best Manufacturing in Menlo; Bullard Sausage Plant, and the Lyerly Mattress Works. According to the paper, these manufacturing facilities accounted for an annual payroll of \$14 million.²³ Among the largest manufacturers in Sumerville in the 1960s, Georgia Rug Mill, a division of Begelo-Sanford Carpet Company, was one of the country's first producers of tufted carpets. Started at the close of World War II, by 1960 the mill had expanded at least six different

²¹U. S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of the Population*, vol 1, part 12 "Georgia," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1963). U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Characteristics of the Population*, vol. 1, part 12, "Georgia," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1973).

²² "Streamlined Berryton Firm Makes Fine Yarn," *Summerville News*, Special Edition, September 29, 1960, p. 2.

²³ "Industry and Community Are Interdependent."

times and was surrounded by a mill village that included a general store, a modern steam power plant, and numerous warehouses and machine shops.²⁴ Also located within the city limits of Summerville was the Summerville Manufacturing Company, which started operations in 1907 and had grown into a multi-million-dollar operation by the 1960s. As reported in *The Summerville News*, the plant in 1960 employed 460 workers with an annual payroll around \$1.5 million.²⁵

In addition to these carpet manufacturing facilities, Best Manufacturing, a glove maker, moved its factory to the small town of Menlo, in the western part of Chattooga County, in 1951 after Riegel moved its glove-making division out of Trion. The owners of Best knew that Riegel's closure would leave a pool of qualified, out-of-work, glove makers available for employment. In less than ten years, Best had grown into one of the three largest producers of coated, or dipped, work gloves in the country. In the 1960s, the company employed between 300 and 400 workers and produced more than 3,000 dozen pairs of gloves each day.²⁶ Eventually adding a research facility and a second warehouse, Best continues to operate in the county today under the name Best/Showa.

By the 1960s, textile manufacturing had become the main source of income for most residents of Chattooga County and was viewed by many residents as the county's best road toward economic success. The news coverage and the large parade through downtown

²⁴ "Rug Mill Grows By Leaps and Bounds in Summerville," *The Summerville News*, Special Edition, September 29, 1960, p. 4.

²⁵ "Summerville Manufacturing Company Makes Various Cotton Products," *The Summerville News*, Special Edition, September 29, 1960, p. 6.

²⁶ "Good Workers Aid Menlo Glove Firm in Expanding," *The Summerville News*, Special Edition, September 29, 1960, p. 8.

Summerville organized in commemoration of Georgia Industry Week in September, 1960, testify to this perspective. In an editorial of September 29, 1960, the *Summerville News* made the following statement about the relationship between Chattooga County and its manufacturing firms.

First, our population loss would have been much greater had it not been for our existing plants. Although numbers of young people have had to go out of the county for jobs, numbers of others have been able to remain here, thanks to our industries. Second, these already established plants are the backbone of our economic life. ... And last but by no means least in importance, support and encouragement by each of us can do much to keep our present industries here and help them grow. We must not forget that when we help industry, we help ourselves. If we hurt industry, we hurt ourselves.²⁷

Similar statements supporting industrial growth echoed throughout various issues of the *Summerville News* in the 1960s and 1970s. The *News* published a number of editorials in the early 1960s emphasizing the importance of community efforts designed to encourage industry. In particular, the newspaper issued challenges to the residents to “clean up” the community because industries could afford to be “choosy” about where they located in Georgia.²⁸ A second indicator of the growing importance of manufacturing for the community and the emphasis on industrial growth by leaders of the community is evident in changes made in the county’s high school curriculum. In the fall of 1960, the Chattooga County School Board addressed the issue of agricultural education in the high school. A survey given to all high school students in Chattooga County in 1959 revealed that only eight students were considering farming as a career. One school board member commented that at Summerville High a movement was underway to “shift the agriculture course to a trade type course—one that would prepare boys for jobs in mills or

²⁷ “Industry and Community Are Interdependent.”

²⁸ “Our Industrial Future,” *The Summerville News*, Special Edition, September 8, 1960.

shops.” By 1960, the general consensus of the county school board, regardless of specific opinions about the value of agricultural education, was that “commercial courses should be a vital part of the program in every high school.”²⁹ This general consensus, aided by the passage of the Vocational Education Act of 1963,³⁰ eventually led to the establishment of Chattooga High School as a comprehensive high school that prepared students to work in industry and in the trades.

The growing importance of manufacturing and industrial growth in Chattooga County is mirrored in the census data collected throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In its survey of occupations in the county, the Census Bureau in 1960 found that almost 56% of all Chattooga County residents worked in manufacturing and that most workers listed their occupation as operatives. Although farming had contributed largely to the growth of Chattooga County in the past, it was reported as the primary occupation of only 15% of the workers in Chattooga County in 1960.³¹ During the next decade, these trends became even more pronounced as almost 66% of all Chattooga County workers, according to the 1970 Census, listed manufacturing as their primary area of employment. Again, as in 1960, most of those within the manufacturing sector described themselves as machine operatives. This pattern of employment occurred among both males and females in the county, and among members of both the white and the African American communities.³² Although manufacturing in general, and manufacturing operative in

²⁹ “Does Chattooga Need Agricultural Education,” *The Summerville News*, November 2, 1960, p. 2A.

³⁰ The vocational education act was a federal law that called for expansion of existing high school vocational education programs, the creation of new ones and the creation of workstudy programs available for full-time vocational education students.

³¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population, 1960*.

³² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population, 1970*.

particular, continued to be the number one occupation of workers in Chattooga County, the types of jobs available to residents had become more diversified by 1980. However, farming continued to shrink as a source of income for most county residents throughout the 1970s and 1980s.³³ These data are evidence of the growing role of textile manufacturing within Chattooga County, accompanied by the diminishing importance of agriculture as a source of income. This is a pattern repeated in counties throughout southern Appalachia.³⁴

As manufacturing began to replace agriculture as the primary occupation of Chattooga County's citizens, fewer and fewer families in the region were self-sufficient. As such, the need for a service sector arose in Chattooga County. As such, Downtown Summerville emerged as a center for shopping and entertainment in the Chattooga County area. Downtown Summerville, then, transformed from a place where farmers brought their crops for sale and distribution into a place where workers and manufacturers came to buy groceries and furniture and clothing. In addition, it grew into a place where millhands and mill owners alike could come for entertainment. Downtown Summerville in the 1950s and 1960s, then, emerged as the social and economic center of Chattooga County.

Although faced with high poverty measures and high dropout rates, Chattooga County and Summerville entered the 1960s with hopes for a bright future. The county seat served as a bustling economic center for this small southern Appalachian county. A report from the Dun and

³³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population, 1980*.

³⁴ Tom Lee, *The Tennessee-Virginia Tri-Cities: Urbanization in Appalachia, 1900-1950*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2005). John Alexander Williams, *Appalachia: A History*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Both of these books are good overviews of the growth of industry in the Appalachia. Jacqueline Dowd Hall, James L. Leloudis, Robert Rodgers Korstad, Mary Murphy, Lu Ann Jones, and Christopher B. Daly, *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987) presents the laborer's view of the growth of the cotton mill village in southern Appalachia.

Bradstreet Reference Book's listing of manufacturers, wholesalers, and retailers who seek or grant commercial credit showed a 10% growth in the number of businesses in Chattooga County in January, 1961, as compared to the same month in 1960.³⁵ Those who lived in the county in the 1960s describe downtown Summerville as a busy place crowded with retail outlets and shoppers. Mr. Milford Morgan, born and raised in Summerville, related that the biggest problem he recalled as a child going to town was finding a parking space. He remembers having to circle the square several times before finding a place to park.³⁶ Both a survey of Summerville newspapers and of high school yearbook advertisements show that the town was filled with retail stores including several clothing stores, Pesterfield's Department store, two grocery stores, two pharmacies, several diners or cafes, a shoe store, a movie theatre, and several service stations.³⁷ Although the downtown stores, like stores in small towns across Georgia, were segregated, both African American and white residents of Chattooga County did most of their shopping in downtown Summerville.

Many residents of Chattooga County remember a town where blacks and whites were served differently at stores and restaurants. Linda Hawkins, an African American woman who grew up in Chattooga County, recalls that her father, a farmer and landowner, took her and her siblings to "town" each year after her father was paid for his crop. They would travel from Gore, a farming community about seven miles south of Summerville. Like many African American families in the region, her family owned no car and had to "hitchhike" to town. She said that

³⁵ "Chattooga Gains in Number of Business Firms in Year," *The Summerville News*, January 12, 1961, p. 1A.

³⁶ Milford Morgan interview, February 7, 2012, in Summerville, Georgia.

³⁷ Suzanne Lanier interview, June 27, 2006; Milford Morgan interview; Linda Hawkins interview, January 28, 2012.

some white people would pass by her family, but that one man would always stop and let them get in the back seat. Once in town, the family would follow their father into Pesterfield's, the local department store. She recalls, "Mr. Pesterfield knew Daddy was there to buy us shoes. He ushered us to the back of the store and he would wait on us himself. We would get our shoes and go out the back way."³⁸

The same segregation of customers was found in the cafes and soda fountains in Summerville. Everyone interviewed remembers that black customers at Alexander's Restaurant were always served through the back door while white customers ate inside and entered through the front door. Maxine West tells of an incident during the early 1960s when she and a group of other young African Americans from the local black high school, A.C Carter, decided to stage a sit-in at Alexander's. Though she does not remember the incident well, she says, "We went in through the front door and sat at the counter. We weren't sure what we were gonna do. I just remember that my brother ordered a milk shake and when they brought it to us somebody in the back, in the kitchen, had put hot sauce or ketchup, or something, in it....Then, we just got up and left."³⁹ No mention of this event was found in the local newspaper, and no one interviewed in the white community recalled ever hearing of the incident.

Similar racial divisions at the local movie theatre, the Tooga, were recounted by white and black county residents. The white residents recall watching movies at the Tooga where the white patrons would enter through the front door and sit on the ground floor of the theatre; they remember African American customers entered through a side or back door and sat in the

³⁸ Linda Hawkins interview.

³⁹ Maxine West interview, January 28, 2012, Summerville, Georgia.

balcony. Both black and white residents said that they never thought to question the fairness of this practice. “It was just the way things were.”⁴⁰ As Milford Morgan said, “Everyone sorta knew their place, and you just accepted that.”⁴¹ The black residents of Chattooga County echoed a similar attitude. Linda Hawkins said that her parents “sorta taught us that was just the way things were. They protected us. They didn’t want us to get hurt. So they told us to just go on about our business.” She said that when her father was younger he and his brother got into some trouble with some white men in town and ended up in jail. When her grandfather went to town to try to straighten it out, he ended up in jail as well. She said that from that time on her father decided he didn’t want that to happen again to himself or to his children. He taught them “to be patient and not make waves.”⁴² This same attitude toward segregation appears to have governed life in Chattooga County throughout the 1960s even as desegregation became a reality within the schools.

Demographic Data of the 1960s and 1970s

Overall, Chattooga County entered the decade of the 1960s as an economically and socially stable community. There was little evidence of a threat to either the social or the economic stability of this small, rural southern Appalachian county. In large part, the business and politics of the county were controlled by a group of white land owners, merchants, and professionals. The racial divisions in the town were deeply ingrained in the culture, and seemingly were accepted by people throughout the community. A complete picture of this

⁴⁰ Linda Hawkins interview; Milford Morgan interview; Suzanne Lanier interview.; Gene McGinnis interview, Summerville, Georgia, July 24, 2006.

⁴¹ Milford Morgan interview.

⁴² Linda Hawkins interview.

county and its people, however, requires a more specific study of the socio-economic characteristics of those who resided in Chattooga County at the time of school desegregation.

Demographic Profile of Chattooga County in the 1960s and 1970s

To better understand the county's residents and their reactions to forced school desegregation requires an examination of the demographic and economic composition of Chattooga County in the 1960s and 1970s. Entering the turbulent 1960s, Chattooga County had a population of 19,954 which represented a decline of 10% from the 1940 U.S. Census. Although both the county's rural population and Summerville's population had grown in the 1950s, the urban population of Trion had fallen from 3,028 in 1950 to 2,227 in 1960.⁴³ Cutbacks at the Riegel Mills appear to be one source of this population loss. By 1970, the population of Chattooga County had grown just over 3%, to 20,547, as both the city of Summerville as well as the rural areas of the county gained in population. The town of Trion, however, continued to lose residents as its population fell over 8% during the decade of the 1960s, from just over 2200 in 1960 to only 1965 residents in 1970. During this same time period, the city of Summerville grew from just over 4,000 in 1950, to just over 5,000 in 1970. While the mill in Trion was cutting back its operations, the Georgia Rug Mill in Summerville, along with the Berryton Mill just outside Summerville, and Best Glove Manufacturing in Menlo were opening and increasing their production capabilities. This shift in manufacturing jobs, then, was accompanied by a shift in population. As the county moved through the 1970s, the population rates settled into a steady pattern as Trion's population figures remained constant while the county maintained a fairly

⁴³ The U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *U.S. Census of Population*, vol. 1, "Characteristics of the Population," pt. 12, "Georgia," (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.), 1953.; *U.S. Census of Population*, vol. 1, "Characteristics of the Population," vol. 1, pt. 12, "Georgia," (U.S. Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C.), 1963.

stable population that grew at a rate of less than 3% each year. The city of Summerville actually lost nearly 4% of its population in the 1970s falling to 4,843 people.⁴⁴

Table 4. Population of Chattooga County, Summerville, and Trion, 1960-1980

	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u> ⁴⁵
Chattooga County	19,954	20,541	21,732
Summerville	4,708	5,043	4,843
Trion	2,227	1,965	

Within this fairly stable population, Chattooga County, like many rural areas in Appalachia, maintained a largely homogeneous population. According to the 1960 census, the percentage of “non-white” population in Chattooga County was 9.3% and no foreign-born individuals were reported to be living in the county. In addition, over 77% of all people in the county lived in the state of their birth. This same tendency toward racial and ethnic homogeneity and population stability remained true throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In 1970, the percentage of African Americans in the county’s population had grown by less than 1%, and by 1980 African Americans comprised about 10% of the county’s population. Chattooga County’s stable population has remained largely white and native born throughout its history. That trend continues today.

Table 5. Racial Composition of Chattooga County, 1960 – 1980

	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>
White Population	90.7	90.3	90
Black Population	9.3	9.7	10

⁴⁴ *U.S. Census of Population*, 1960, 1970, and 1980.

⁴⁵ The Census Bureau did not record population data separately for the town of Trion in the 1980 Census.

Census data on education and income levels mirror a similar pattern of slow growth. These data are the most poignant indicators of the social and economic climate of this Appalachian Georgia county. In 1960, the average number of years of schooling for people 25 years or older was 8.1 years in the county as a whole, and 8.3 years in the city of Summerville. In comparison, the average person in the state of Georgia as a whole had completed 9 years of schooling. By 1980, this figure had improved somewhat with residents of Chattooga County having completed an average of 10.1 years of schooling for white residents and 10.3 years for African American residents.⁴⁶

An examination of high school graduation rates reveals a similar trend. Although showing marked improvement from 1960 to 1980, graduation rates remained below state levels throughout the time period, even as they do today. In 1960, only 25.5% of all residents twenty-five and older had completed high school, and just over 3% had completed four years of college. At the same time, almost 40% of all Georgia residents over twenty-five had graduated from high school, and 7.5% had completed four years or more of college. During the next decade, the percentage of high school graduates in the county fell to just over 20%, even as the number of high school graduates in the state increased to 46.3%. From 1970 to 1980, however, the percentage of high school graduates grew in the county to just over 34%. Although the schools were making some strides toward improved graduation rates, the number of county residents leaving school to get a job remained above the state average from the 1960s through the 1980s.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *U.S. Census of Population*, 1960, 1980.

⁴⁷ *U.S. Census of Population*, 1960, 1970, 1980.

Table 6. Average Years of School Completed and Graduation Rates for Chattooga County and the State of Georgia, 1960

	<u>Chattooga County</u>	<u>Georgia</u>
Years of Schooling	8.1 years	9 years
H.S. Graduation Rates	25.5%	40%

The lagging rate of educational attainment in the county, along with the large number of low-skilled labor jobs, combined to stunt the growth of wages and standards of living within Chattooga County. The 1960 census reported that the median family income in the county was \$3804, or 90% of the state median income. For non-whites in the county, the median income was only \$2,310, which was only 61% of the median income for the county as a whole. By 1970, median family income in the county had grown to \$7561, or just over 92% of the state's median family income. In addition, 17.1% of the county's population lived below the poverty level compared with a poverty level of 20.7% in the state. In comparison to the state as a whole, the income level and the poverty level for Chattooga residents had improved during the 1960s. Though the county's median income remained below that of the state, the growth of industry in the county during the 1960s had helped close this gap and actually had lowered the poverty level of county residents so that it was more than three percentage points below that of all Georgia residents. The decade of the seventies saw a continuation of this trend as the median family income rose to almost \$13,000 and the number of families living below the poverty level fell to 12.4%.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ *U.S. Census of Population*, 1960, 1970, 1980.

Table 7. Percent Below the Poverty Level and Median Household Income for Chattooga County, 1960-1980

	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>
Georgia			
Poverty Level		20.7%	16.6%
Median Income	\$4208	\$8167	\$13,509
Chattooga County			
Poverty Level		17.1%	12.4%
Median Income	\$3804	\$7561	\$12,908

Overall, these data reveal a county that, though lagging behind the rest of the state, was poised, in the 1960s, to improve both its educational and economic status. Although much of the employment created in the county through the growth of existing industry and the establishment of new industry was for unskilled laborers, this growth served to keep residents in the county and to create a demand for the development of retail and service industries. This is evident in the fact that by 1970 just over 25% of all workers in the county considered themselves white collar workers, and by 1980 technical, sales, and administrative support occupations had grown into the second most prevalent occupation in the county.⁴⁹

Chattooga County entered the 1960s and 1970s with some movement toward overcoming the extreme poverty of the region. In addition, some advancement was underway in the areas of educational achievement. However, the problems of the schools remained one of the greatest obstacles to the social and economic progress necessary to change the economic fate of this struggling rural Georgia county. A number of events centering around education, community identity, and race would affect the direction toward educational reform and growth that could have changed the future of this county and its people. An examination of the history of schooling

⁴⁹ *U.S. Census of Population, 1970, 1980.*

in Chattooga County and of the developments surrounding the county's schools during the 1960s reveals the struggles faced by a community divided by identity, social class, and race. These forces and the divisions they often brought on shaped the decades of the sixties, seventies, and eighties in this Appalachian area of Northwest Georgia. The study of these historical forces at work in the county's schools is the focus of the next chapter that examines the emergence of Chattooga County's two racially segregated school systems, and the evolution of these systems from the late 19th century to the 1960s.

CHAPTER 3
SCHOOLING IN CHATTOOGA COUNTY:
ITS HISTORY AND ITS STRUGGLES

An understanding of the struggles encountered by Chattooga County schools during the years of desegregation first requires examination of the origins of the two racially divided school systems that developed in the county. This chapter provides an historical examination of both the Chattooga County School System and the Trion City School System. It begins with the origins of schooling for white children in Chattooga County before telling the story of the establishment of separate schooling for Chattooga's black and white children from its inception up to the years of desegregation. Following this historical overview of the development of the county's school systems, the chapter provides greater depth into the primary focus of the county school systems in the early 1960s—school consolidation. The strains placed on county residents' sense of community identity are further explored in the struggle over consolidating the Chattooga County and the Trion City Schools beginning in the 1960s and continuing through the early 1970s—throughout the years of school desegregation. Overall, the chapter shows the development of, and differences between, both the Chattooga County and Trion City Schools and the black and white schools in the county. As such, it sets the stage for the struggle over desegregation that will dominate the actions of the political, educational, and social leaders of the county throughout the late 1960s and 1970s.

Origins of Schooling in Chattooga County

As with most communities across the state of Georgia, the education of its children has accounted for much of the social, economic, and political activity in Chattooga County since its inception. One of the first actions of the newly created county government was to establish a minimal school system for the white children in Chattooga County who could not afford either private schooling or private tutoring. The funding for this school system, the only schooling available to poor children in Georgia in the 1800s, came from what was known as the Poor School Fund. In 1858, the Chattooga County Inferior Court levied a 12% school tax for the education of the poor children.¹ In addition to the poor schools, the county also established a system of old field schools. These schools generally were located in church buildings and were funded by groups of parents who worked together to share the expense of the teacher. Although the schools closed during the Civil War and operated only a short time after the war ended, they served as a precursor for the education of Chattooga County's rural children. For the wealthier children of the county, a third educational alternative existed—the private academy. These academies were supported by tuition from the wealthiest parents in the county and were run by a board of trustees made up primarily of businessmen, doctors, lawyers, and ministers.² Despite the backing of these wealthy residents, however, all the academies in Chattooga County encountered financial troubles, and by the early 1890s all had shut their doors.

Following the Civil War, the need for privately funded schools diminished after the Georgia legislature created a state school board and instructed each school district to make arrangements for the separate schooling of its white and the black children. In Chattooga County,

¹ Baker, p. 449.

² Baker, p. 450-453.

the first Board of Education meeting was held on February 7, 1871. By the end of the first year of operation, the county schools were divided into the following nine local districts— Summerville, Trion, Teloga, Alpine (Menlo), Dirtseller, Seminole, Coldwater, Dirttown, and Haywood. One of the more difficult tasks of the early county school board was finding teachers for the black schools. In 1881, the situation was so dire that the board voted to contact Atlanta University to find a number of black teachers to take charge of the schools for the black children in the county.³

The development of public schools in Chattooga County is the story of the consolidation of large numbers of small school districts into a smaller number of larger school districts. By 1905, the 37 white schools and 12 black schools in operation in the county in 1900 had been reduced to 26 all-white schools and 11 all-black schools. One of the primary reasons for continued school consolidation was the problem of funding. To help fund the schools, the board of education borrowed money from local banks, individual citizens, and even local churches. By 1921, the lack of funds was so critical that at the April fifth meeting of the Chattooga County School Board, members “discussed the propriety of suspending the schools in the county” because of the financial crisis.⁴ This same problem of financial shortfalls drove the heated debate over school consolidation that would consume the educational decisions in Chattooga County in the early 1960s.

History of the Education of African American Children in Chattooga County

Similar to counties throughout the southeastern United States, Chattooga County developed a dual school system for its white and black students following the Civil War. Prior to

³ Baker, pp. 454-455.

⁴ Baker, p. 461-462.

the war, an 1829 state law had made it a crime to teach slaves to read and “legislation and white attitudes discouraged literacy in Georgia’s free black community.”⁵ As the war ended, however, schools for African American children in Chattooga County followed the trends established in the state as a whole. The schools primarily were privately funded by both religious groups and the African American students themselves. The earliest education of African American children in Chattooga County was an outgrowth of concern among churches and individual families in the African American community itself. Records remain of at least two schools for African American children in Chattooga County in the 1870s and 1880s. Some accounts trace the earliest schooling of blacks in the county to a one-room school that was destroyed by storm in the 1880s. Following the school’s destruction, the trustees of the Hemphill A.M. E. Zion Church voted to open the doors of the church as a school for any black children in the county. After two years at the Hemphill School, several other locations across Chattooga County were used as schools for black children.⁶

Other accounts point to the establishment of the Oak Hill School, directly across the street from the Oak Hill Missionary Baptist Church in the Gore community of Chattooga County, as the earliest school for African American children. According to a history of the Oak Hill School written by Jessie Maria Salmon Mosley, one the of the school’s earliest students and teachers, the school was built after 1874 when “F. W. Cheney deeded one acre of land to the black community of Gore for ‘as long as the world stands.’”⁷ Mrs. Mosley recalls that this school

⁵ Ronald E. Butchart, “Freedmen’s Education during Reconstruction,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia* online, last update: September 3, 2002.

⁶ Emily Stewart, “History of Black Schools in Chattooga County,” unpublished document in Georgia Room of the Chattooga County Library, Summerville, Georgia.

⁷ Jessie Mariah Salmon Mosley; and B. J. Mosley, “History of Oak Hill School,” unpublished document in Georgia Room of the Chattooga County Library, Summerville, Georgia.

was supported primarily by the community who “cut and hauled firewood for the potbellied wood stove and [brought] water... [transported] by the students.” She further recalls that school supplies were often donated by members of the community including Mrs. Lula Weesner, a teacher in the all-white school at Silver Hill, who “gave the discarded paper which was clean on one side and used by her students on the other side.”⁸ The history of the public schools for African Americans in Chattooga County is one echoed throughout the southeastern United States where the separate schooling for the two races was far from equal in either funding or facilities.

This trend of unequal schooling is evidenced in a study of the facilities made available to African American students in Chattooga County. Around 1925, the Chattooga County School Board built a new high school and junior high school for the white students of the county: the black students in Summerville were moved into the old Taylor Institute, a private school that operated in a building on Highland Street in Summerville from 1919 to 1924. This school was known as the Summerville Colored Public School until 1959 when it was renamed the A.C. Carter Consolidated School in honor of one of the school’s principals. In 1951, the all-black high schools in Menlo and Holland were closed and consolidated into the Summerville school. Finally, in 1957, a new school was built for the black students of Summerville; this was the first new school ever built for the black children of Chattooga County. Up to that time, the African American children of the county always were housed in former all-white schools that were no longer acceptable for occupancy by the white students.⁹

For the African American children living outside Summerville in Chattooga County’s more rural areas, the Holland School was one of the primary locations for public school

⁸ Mosley, p. 1.

⁹ Stewart, p. 1.

education. The school originated in 1927 when Mr. R.B. Nichols worked with the Chattooga County Board of Education and the Rosenwald Fund to establish the Chattooga Training School in the Holland area of southwestern Chattooga County. The school was designed to teach basic reading and math skills to students in grades one through seven. However, there was no high school associated with the Holland School.¹⁰

As school enrollment increased throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Chattooga Training School added a workshop as part of its school facilities, and vocational training became a major part of its academic program. In 1935, the vocational program included home and field projects as well as a food canning program for the community.¹¹ By the 1950s, the Gore and Lyerly schools for African American children had consolidated into the Holland School which, by that time, included six classrooms, a workshop, a home economics building, and a school for veterans. The two latter school programs were housed in old army barracks. These barracks became useful after the 1955-1956 school year when original parts of the school building were demolished by a bulldozer. Julius Thomas reported that this demolition took place without notification to the school's students or their parents. The students arrived on the first day of school to the scene of bulldozers demolishing much of their school building. The students, according to Thomas, "hastened to salvage as many books and desks as possible."¹² In 1957, the high school portion of the Chattooga County Training School in Holland was consolidated with the A.C. Carter High School in Summerville. Several years later, the school's name was changed to Holland Elementary, and it continued to serve as the elementary school for the rural African

¹⁰ Stewart, p. 5-6.

¹¹ Julius Thomas, "A History of Holland School," unpublished document housed in the Georgia Room of the Chattooga County Library, Summerville, Georgia.

¹² Thomas, p. 2.

American children of the county until its student body was incorporated into the Lyerly School in 1966 during school desegregation.¹³

School Consolidation in Chattooga County

As the Chattooga County School System entered the 1960s, one of its greatest obstacles was that of financing. By 1960, all the county junior high schools, and many of the county's elementary schools, had been closed and consolidated into the Summerville Elementary and Junior High Schools. Still, as revealed in Chattooga County School Board minutes, this school system of 2,810 white students maintained three white high schools—Lyerly, Menlo, and Summerville. In addition, the system supported two high schools—one in Summerville and one in Holland—for the 463 African American students in the county.¹⁴ These figures represented a decrease in enrollment of almost eighty students over the previous year's figures. As a consequence of this loss in average daily attendance (ADA), the county school system lost three state-paid teacher positions. This loss of funding exacerbated an ongoing problem of teacher pay that had plagued the schools for years.

Although the struggle over funding had existed for decades, the efforts to alleviate this problem became the major focus of the school system, as well as the county as a whole, once James Spence was elected Chattooga County school superintendent in November of 1960. During this same election, Chattooga County voters also approved an amendment to the county constitution that provided for an elected board rather than a grand jury-appointed one. According to the amendment, one person would be elected from each of the five "education districts"—Summerville, Trion (areas with a Trion address that technically lay outside the city limits of

¹³ Thomas, p. 5.

¹⁴ "County School Enrollment Shows Decline," *The Summerville News*, September 8, 1960, 1-A.

Trion), Menlo, Lyerly, and Dirttown/Subligna. The change in school board selection is significant as it affected decisions about school consolidation that dominated educational policy making in the county over the next decade.¹⁵

From their first meeting, Superintendent Spence and the school board established their primary goal as one of economic efficiency. Spence explained to the board that the primary reason for the county's financial woes was that state money fell short of payroll needs because the system was employing several 'unearned' teachers. Schools in Georgia in the 1960s and today were allotted teachers according to the number of students attending school. Money from the state designated for teacher salaries was determined by average daily attendance, ADA, numbers. Larger, more affluent areas with a larger tax base were less restricted by these numbers because they could hire 'unearned' teachers—teachers whose salaries were not covered through the state's allotment for ADA. These districts used excess local property tax money to pay for extra teachers. In small, poor counties such as Chattooga, however, there was little or no excess property tax to cover the expense of these 'unearned' teachers. As such, state money that normally would be used for building maintenance was going toward teacher salaries.¹⁶ As reported in *The Summerville News*, this discrepancy in funding meant that the school board was starting the new school year with \$15,283 in unpaid bills.

The problem of unpaid bills had been festering since the start of the 1960 school year. Although the board closed the Gore and Subligna high schools in the late 1950s, the issue of unearned teachers continued to haunt the school system. At its meeting on September 6, 1960, the board adopted a budget that included the borrowing of more than \$30,000 over the course of

¹⁵ "Chattooga Overwhelmingly Okays School Board Plan," *The Summerville News*, November 10, 1960, 1A

¹⁶ "'Economy' is Theme of New Board of Education," *The Summerville News*, January 5, 1961, 1A, 2A.

the 1960-1961 school year. One school board member, W.H. Farrar, voted against the proposed budget on grounds that it included funding for an unearned teacher at the combined Gore-Subligna Elementary School. Farrar pointed out that the state would probably not pay for one of the five teachers at the school because two of the classes had fewer than the state-required minimum of fifteen students per room. Although a number of the first through eighth grades already were combined to account for lower than state-mandated numbers, the board rejected the idea of combining two more grades to reduce the number of teaching positions at the school.¹⁷

To combat this growing problem of deficit spending, the new superintendent proposed what would become, in his words, the most controversial decision of his career—high school consolidation.¹⁸ The movement toward consolidation was supported by a Georgia State Department of Education report made by a committee on school improvement that studied the county and its school situation. As reported in *The Summerville News*, the committee maintained that it would be less expensive to provide a broad program of study in “facilities in larger school centers.”¹⁹ As such, the committee recommended the construction of a twenty-seven room Chattooga County High School that would consolidate the Summerville, Menlo, and Lyerly high school student bodies into a single county high school. In addition, the report recommended that the two-story school buildings at Lyerly and Summerville be abandoned.²⁰

¹⁷ “Chattooga School Deficit Expected to Jump \$14,000 in 60-61, Budget Shows,” *The Summerville News*, 1A, 2A.

¹⁸ Interview with James Spence, in his home in Dalton, GA, July 12, 2006.

¹⁹ This was true despite that consolidation meant that many students would be bussed from more rural areas in the county into Summerville. In large part, this is because the average price of gas in 1960 was \$.31.

²⁰ “Committee Says Larger Schools Less Expensive,” *The Summerville News*, February 9, 1961, 1A. Chattooga County School Board, “Minutes,” February 7, 1961.

Immediately after receiving the state board's recommendations for the school system, the Chattooga County School Board voted to consolidate the county's three white high schools and to build a new Chattooga County High School to be completed by the 1962-1963 school year. The vote to consolidate was 3 to 2 with the representatives from Lyerly and Menlo each voting no. Although opponents of the measure argued that the consolidation should be delayed until the new high school was built, the majority of the board members agreed with W.P. Sprayberry, the State Department of Education supervisor for the Chattooga County area, that the consolidation should begin during the next school year. Even though the two members from Menlo and Lyerly questioned if there were enough classrooms on the Summerville High School campus for the 150 students who would transfer from Menlo and Lyerly, the board chair, W.P. Selman, pointed out that the additional students would bring the enrollment to just under 1,000 students, or about thirty students per classroom. State Board Representative Sprayberry conceded that though the "physical facilities at the present campus may not be as good as everyone would like, officials should be able to greatly enrich the program."²¹

To the residents, teachers, and trustees, of the Lyerly and Menlo schools, this decision was an attack on both their community identity and their way of life. Superintendent Spence recalls that anger and resentment surrounding the school consolidation decision far outweighed that associated with school desegregation. Following the decision, his office was inundated with angry phone calls including more than one threat to his life. He says that although he "didn't take them [the death threats] very seriously," he did know that the decision to consolidate was the

²¹ "Lyerly, Menlo, Summerville High Schools to Consolidate; New Site Outside City Being Planned," *The Summerville News*, February 9, 1961, 1A, 2A. Chattooga County School Board, "Minutes," February 7, 1961.

“right decision” and that the implementation had to be handled delicately.²² Whereas many supporters of the Lyerly School told the school board that they favored consolidation, but simply asked that it be postponed until after construction of the new consolidated high school, the Menlo parents and supporters resisted consolidation altogether. The supporters of the Menlo High School hired a law firm from Rome to argue their case and filed a request for a hearing with the Chattooga Board of Education. In the petition, the Menlo group claimed that the resolution to consolidate the schools was “capricious, fanciful, bizarre, incongruent and does not and did not reflect the sentiments and wishes of the citizens most affected thereby.”²³ The ten-page protest contended that the facilities at Summerville High School were inadequate to meet the needs of its present student population and that the facilities in Menlo could better serve the students of Menlo. As proof, the resolution pointed to the fact that the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (SACS) had approved the Menlo School and its facilities without recommendations, while it had approved Summerville High School with the recommendation for “Construction of a new building to take the place of the two-story building to be abandoned, and other and further additional changes and repairs.”²⁴ The overall argument presented by the legal document was that the decision to consolidate was taken without regard for the opinions of the Menlo residents or for the students of Menlo School, and that the Menlo School provided an education equal to, if not better than, that of Summerville High.

²² Interview with Mr. James Spence, in his home in Dalton, GA, July 12, 2006.

²³ Norman Garvin, Edwin Thompson, W. B. Young, Tom Dodd, and Norman Tucker v. The Chattooga County Board of Education, “Statement of Contentions and Request for Hearing,” Presented to the Chattooga County School Board March 7, 1961.

²⁴ Garvin, Thompson, Young, Dodd, and Tucker.

These conclusions by the supporters of Menlo School, however, contradicted those reached by the Georgia State Board of Education Committee as early as 1958. At that time, the committee recommended that all high schools in the county consolidate into one in order that “a proper curriculum ...be available to all students.”²⁵ As a result of the county school board’s decision to close only the Subligna High School, but not the Lyerly and Menlo high schools, the state board of education threatened to cut off \$600,000 in allocated funds to the county. To avoid this situation, the Lyerly and Menlo communities each raised \$4250 to buy the mandated science equipment and to hire a vocational agriculture teacher to serve the two schools. Once these accommodations were in place, the state board returned the funding, and by the 1960 school year, both high schools had received the more stringent SACS accreditation.²⁶ These endeavors by the two communities to raise the standard of education at their schools were, to both Menlo and Lyerly supporters, further evidence of why their schools should remain open. Because of the good faith efforts of the citizens of the two towns, the Menlo and Lyerly patrons argued, their children received an education equal to that of the students at Summerville High School.

Despite the activities of the Menlo High School patrons, the consolidation proceeded during the 1961- 1962 school. Following two failed attempts before the Georgia State Board of Education to have the consolidation decision rescinded and a negative verdict from Judge S. W. Fariss of the Chattooga Superior Court, the attorney representing the Menlo School dropped the case. Attorney Robert Scoggins said that because the state supreme court declined to meet in special session to hear the appeal, the case would be a moot issue by the time the court met in September. However, the impact of this fight left lasting impressions on many students from

²⁵ “Chattooga board Eyes School Consolidations,” *Rome News-Tribune*, July 22, 1958, 1A.

²⁶ “Registration in Chattooga County Schools Begins,” *Rome News-Tribune*, August 25, 1958, 1A.

both Summerville and Menlo. Even today, there is a feeling among Summerville residents that the students who come to Chattooga High School from Menlo and Lyerly view their own schools as superior to those in Summerville. Many former Summerville students who were in school during the consolidation debate still view school consolidation as a negative influence on the education in the county. Milford Morgan, a 1971 graduate of Chattooga High School, said that if he could point to one thing that had hurt the schools the most, it was consolidation.

Consolidation for the city of Summerville has been bad because Summerville is who lost its identity as a school. And I never saw any need in it. Just the year before we had beaten just about everybody we played in football. We'd won the region and had played for the state championship right before consolidation. And the schools never really merged into one. They always thought they were better than us.²⁷

When asked if he thought that division among the students from Summerville and Menlo still existed in the high school today, he replied, "Yes, I think it is. So many of those Menlo kids are just preparing to go to Trion when they leave eighth grade."²⁸ Although the actual statistics on the number of Menlo School eighth grade students who attend schools other than Chattooga fail to reflect this pattern, the perceptions of the adults in Summerville are quite different. These old wounds are slow to heal in a county where, for the adults at least, community identity rests, not just with the county of birth, but with the small town or community within that county in which they were born.

Construction of Chattooga High School

Although the School Board planned to construct and occupy the new Chattooga High School by the fall of 1962, the campus was not ready for students until spring of 1965. Although

²⁷ Milford Morgan Interview in his home, Summerville, GA, February 7, 2012.

²⁸ Milford Morgan interview.

a number of delays in construction led to this late occupancy date, one of the main problems lay in the lack of funding. The original bond issue of \$572,000 had been turned down by Chattooga voters in May of 1961. This bond refusal was a result of bad feeling stemming from the consolidation controversy. Voters in both Menlo and Lyerly waged a campaign against the bond issue. Not until June of 1963 were voters in the county willing to approve a smaller bond issue of \$327,396. Even in this election, however, the Menlo precinct voted 402 to 40 in opposition to the bond issue. Because of this lowered bond value, the high school was built without the football stadium or the separate gymnasium that had been part of the original design.

Originally, the plan for the high school was to house grades ten through twelve, placing the ninth grade students in the “Summerville Upper Elementary School” housed in the old Summerville High School building. However, in January of 1965, during the first full school year in the new Chattooga High School, a fire destroyed almost half of the classroom areas in the Upper Elementary School. For this reason, the county school board voted to move the ninth grade into Chattooga High School and to postpone rebuilding the junior high. This necessary step may have damaged the original plan by the school board for bringing together all the county’s white students into the ninth grade at the old school for them to bond before moving together into the new Chattooga High School. Regardless of the cause, for Summerville residents like Milford Morgan, a Summerville Junior High School student in 1966, the division among the white students from the various communities was never bridged.

Despite these issues, occupying the new high school campus became a point of great pride for many of the residents of Chattooga County. The senior class of 1965 lobbied the school board for permission to move into the school building before the end of its senior year. After presenting their arguments for the springtime move—including that their graduation invitations

invited guests to the “new” Chattooga High School, and that moving into the school was part of the high school yearbook theme—the school board agreed to allow students and teachers to move onto the new campus during Easter holiday weekend of 1965.²⁹

As reflected in *The Summerville News* coverage of the event, and in the school yearbook’s celebration of the move, the new school was viewed as a step toward economic and social progress for this rural Appalachian county. A number of students who entered high school in the late 1960s related that they felt a real sense that their education was preparing them for any college or career goals they might have. *The Summerville News* described the new school as among the most modern school buildings around. According to the newspaper, the school layout was conducive to training Chattooga’s schoolchildren for the technological and industrial needs of the twentieth century. In particular, it was equipped with television hookups in each classroom and with climate control for all seasons. In addition, the front of the school was designed with “fixed panels and anodized gold aluminum solar grills” that reflected the look and the new materials of the modern age.³⁰ Although the new school originally was designed to house grades ten through twelve, as noted previously, the fire at the former high school in January, 1966, led to the placement of the ninth grade classes at the new high school in the winter of 1966.

Establishment of the Vocational Program

In spite of the excitement and the hope surrounding the construction of this new modern high school, Chattooga County continued to struggle with educating all of its young people—both white and black. William Hair, former head of the vocational department at Chattooga,

²⁹ “Occupancy Date of New CHS to be Decided Saturday,” *The Summerville News*, April 15, 1965, 1-A.; Chattooga County Board of Education, “Minutes,” April 12, 1965.; *The Sequoyah*, Chattooga High School Yearbook, 1965.

³⁰ “New Chattooga School Ready For Bids,” *Rome New-Tribune*, June 27, 1963, 1A.

related that “in those days Mount Vernon (Riegel Mills) would hire anybody. They didn’t care if you had a high school diploma or not.”³¹ For this reason, large numbers of Chattooga students dropped out long before they graduated from high school. As noted previously, the percentage of residents over the age of 25 with a high school diploma remained below 30% even through the 1980s. While the new high school provided educational opportunity for many of the county’s white students, many others—particularly those from poor and working class homes—continued to leave school early in exchange for a mill job and a paycheck. Concerned with this trend among the county’s students, Hair, who described himself as a “grant writer” as well as the leader of the school’s vocational department, began compiling numbers to assess the severity of the dropout situation. Some of the statistics Hair acquired were presented by Superintendent Spence at a meeting of the Summerville Elementary PTA in February of 1968. According to *The Summerville News*, Spence reported that in 1953 291 students entered the ninth grade, but only 153 graduated in 1957. Similarly, in 1961, 299 students entered the ninth grade, and only 154 graduated four years later. Although Hair admitted that the numbers failed to account for students who might have enrolled in other schools or finished school in more than four years, he believed the statistics provided a fairly accurate picture of the graduation situation at Chattooga High in the early 1960s. In addition, Hair’s research revealed that once desegregation took place about half of the county’s African American high school students never returned to school.³²

To address the problem of the high dropout rate, Hair, along with others within the county began work to establish a vocational school at Chattooga that would make the high

³¹ William Hair interview, Decatur, GA, April 2, 2012.

³² “Superintendent Spence Speaks to PTA Group,” *The Summerville News*, February 22, 1968, 1-A.; William Hair interview.: Mr. Hair used these figures to help acquire an Appalachian Grant. He did not know if the original figures or the grant application still existed.

school one of the first “comprehensive” high schools in the state. According to William Hair, the money for the building of the vocational facilities came primarily from an Appalachian grant earmarked for improvements in impoverished Appalachian areas. In addition, the state of Georgia, in the 1960s, initiated a program whereby the state board of education would fund the equipment and pay the teacher salaries for any vocational program for which the school provided the facilities. In this manner, Chattooga High School became just the eighteenth school in the state to offer a full vocational department that taught auto mechanics, business education, electrical construction and maintenance, cosmetology, welding, and horticulture.³³

The real benefit of Chattooga’s program, according to Mr. Hair, was that it was implemented within the same school building as the academic program of the school. Therefore, students could receive vocational training without losing part of their school day being transported to another facility. In addition to the vocational training students received in the school year, the program also included a summer component whereby students with financial need were placed in jobs around the county as a way both to make money and to gain some job training. Although the program was viewed as a success, and it continues as a strong component of Chattooga’s curriculum today, Mr. Hair admitted that it failed to attract large numbers of the African American students who were entering Chattooga High School for the first time following the desegregation of the county schools in 1965 and 1966.

Secondary Education for African Americans in the 1960s

As much attention was given the consolidation and building of the new high school for white children of Chattooga County, the African American children continued to learn in substandard conditions. Hair recalls visiting the A.C. Carter High School to check on the

³³ William Hair interview; “Superintendent Spence Speaks to PTA Group.”

conditions of the typing classes. When he entered the room, he found only fifteen older model typewriters available, as compared to 33 newer typewriters at Chattooga High School. The teacher, he recalls, was in the back of the room with one of the students braiding her hair. He asked the teacher if she had enough books for each typewriter. According to William Hair, she replied, “I don’t really know.” Mr. Hair ordered new books for the classroom and left with the impression that little teaching was taking place. In addition, students were learning from books and equipment that had been discarded by the white schools. Mr. Hair commented that the conditions at the all-black A.C. Carter School were in no way equal to those at all-white Chattooga.³⁴ Still, many of Carter’s graduates, with the help of faithful teachers and the principal, J. L. Thomas, attended colleges across the state of Georgia. According to former A. C. Carter graduate, Linda Farmer Hawkins, however, the road to an adequate education and, therefore, to a more successful future rested in school desegregation.³⁵

Merger Talks Between Trion City Schools and Chattooga County Schools

While much progress was taking place in the Chattooga County Schools, the Trion City School System was struggling to maintain its student body. Between the 1961-1962 school year and the 1973-1974 year, the average daily attendance in the Trion system fell from almost 964 to less than 850. At its lowest mark, the 1971-1972 school year, average enrollment was just over 830. These numbers included children who lived outside the county, but who attended Trion Schools because their parent or guardian worked either at Riegel Mill, for the City of Trion, as a minister in the immediate Trion area, in the Trion Hospital, or for the U.S. Postal Service in the city of Trion. In May of 1966, the Chattooga County and Trion City Schools both approved a

³⁴ William Hair interview.

³⁵ Linda Farmer Hawkins interview, Gore community, Chattooga County, GA, January 28, 2012.

contract in which attendance guidelines were explicitly outlined. This contract formalized an arrangement that had been in place since 1953 to help alleviate overcrowding in the county schools. The contract specified that the Trion Independent School System could receive up to 480 students from the areas of Chattooga County outside the Trion City limits, “provided that at no time shall the number of high school students, grades 9 through 12, exceed 150 students.”³⁶ According to the Chattooga County School Board Minutes, at the time the contract was signed, there were 483 county children attending Trion City Schools out of the total enrollment of 900. Therefore, almost 50% of the Trion student body was comprised of children from outside the system.

The continued weakening of Trion’s enrollment numbers coupled with the state’s emphasis on school consolidation made consolidation the dominant topic of discussion on education among white residents in Chattooga County over the next decade. Although Chattooga and Trion had always been cross-town rivals in sports, the consensus was that the city of Trion could not maintain its school system and provide the best education for its children without consolidating with the county schools.³⁷ This recommendation of closing the Trion City School System and merging it with the Chattooga County System was first proposed in 1961 by the Georgia State Board of Education when it made its earliest reports on the merger of the Menlo

³⁶ Chattooga County School Board, Contract Between Chattooga County School Board and Trion City School Board, In Chattooga School Board “Minutes,” May 12, 1966.; Trion City School Board, “Minutes,” May 12, 1966.

³⁷ Milford Morgan interview.; Mike Poole interview, in Chattooga County Superintendent’s office, June 29, 2006.; Trion School Board, “Minutes,” October 6, 1970. All these sources recollect the hostile atmosphere that existed during the Trion-Chattooga football games. In particular, the grave of the baby son of one of the Chattooga coaches was desecrated before the 1970 game. In addition, eggs were reportedly thrown, along with ice and paper cups. One official was reportedly slapped by a fan. This was the last year the two teams faced each other due to the violence associated with the game.

and Lyerly High Schools with Summerville. From 1966 through the early 1970s, school consolidation became the focus of both school boards. At its meeting on April 21, 1967, the Chattooga school board authorized a feasibility study by the state department of education to consider the possible merger of the Trion and Chattooga school systems. According to *The Summerville News*, the feasibility study committee, meeting with members of the Chattooga County and Trion City boards, recommended that the two systems merge “as soon as possible by whatever methods can be agreed upon...[and that] the two boards of education should draw up a long term contract in order to get the new high school under construction at once.”³⁸ In response to the study’s results, the county school board, in June of 1967, authorized the superintendent and the board chairman to secure an option on any available and desirable site for the proposed high school to serve both Chattooga County and Trion City schools. In July of that same year, the county board agreed to build a high school big enough to accommodate all the county’s children at a site agreed upon by both school boards provided that Chattooga County could get state funds for school consolidation.³⁹

The studies by the state board of education on school consolidation were looked upon favorably by the Trion City School Board as well. In a Trion board meeting on December 5, 1967, the steps for a merger were laid out. According to the minutes of the meeting, the merger was to be presented to the county and city voters as a state constitutional amendment. Further recommendations specified that the new combined school board would include one representative from each militia district and two at-large members and the new school board

³⁸ “Trion School Board Approves Merger Plan,” *The Summerville News*, May 25, 1967.

³⁹ Chattooga County School Board, “Minutes,” June and July meetings, 1967.

would appoint a system-wide superintendent.⁴⁰ Although in its meeting of December 11, 1967, the Chattooga County board also approved the feasibility study of Dr. Doyne Smith and Mr. Paul Sprayberry of the Georgia State Department of Education, no action was taken on the matter, and there is no further mention of the merger in the minutes of either school board until February of 1969. At this meeting, the Chattooga board met with the Trion board about the return of county students from Trion back to Chattooga schools if no contract between the county system and the Trion system about a merger was in place by May 15, 1969. In addition, the county superintendent informed his board that it could qualify for between \$800,000 and \$900,000 from the state for building purposes if a consolidation plan were in place.⁴¹

In response to the county's mandate, the Trion board presented the county with a resolution reaffirming its desire for a merger of the two systems through a constitutional convention that would dispose of both systems as they existed and call for the creation of a new, county-wide system. The resolution also included the following statement about the county students currently attending Trion schools.

Further resolved, ...if action be required prior to the accomplishment of such an amendment that this Board offers to enter into such contract with Chattooga County Board of Education for a 25-year period that will provide for payment by this Board for education by the Chattooga County Board of Education of those students attending grades 7-12 for which it has this responsibility.⁴²

Even though an agreement was not reached by the May 15th deadline, the state school board determined that the county students who were currently attending Trion schools should be

⁴⁰ Trion City School Board, "minutes," December 5, 1967.

⁴¹ Chattooga County Board of Education, Special Meeting, February 20, 1969.; Trion City School Board, "Resolution," February 16, 1969. The same Resolution is in Chattooga County School Board Minutes, February 20, 1969.

⁴² Trion City School Board, "Resolution," February 16, 1969.

allowed to remain. Even after three years of discussions, and both sides favoring a merger, an agreement could not be reached. Because it would take two years before an amendment could be voted on in a general election, neither school board discussed the idea for another two years. According to *The Summerville News*' coverage of the final discussions of the issue of merger during the 1969 school year, the primary point of contention rested on the organization of the new school board that would oversee the new county-wide school system. Whereas the Trion board insisted that the new plan include a "reorganization that embodies a free and equitable representation of all citizens of the county in the governing board,"⁴³ at least some of the members of the Chattooga board insisted on maintaining representation based on the old school districts of Menlo, Lyerly, Pennville, Summerville, and Trion, regardless of population. Much of the division over merging the two school systems, then, rested in the old, but never resolved, dispute over the consolidation of the Menlo and Lyerly schools.⁴⁴

As such, the two school systems remained in place, and in the decades following school desegregation, this dual school system became a source of both rivalry and divisiveness in this small Appalachian county. By failing to reach a compromise on the issue of school governance, the educational leaders of Chattooga County relinquished almost a million dollars in funding, as well as an opportunity for both racial and educational unity. In 1972, the Georgia State Board of Education issued new guidelines on student transfers from a county system to an independent system. The guidelines stated that no longer did students or independent systems need approval

⁴³ "No Agreement Yet On School Merger," *The Summerville News*, March 6, 1969, 1-A.

⁴⁴ Bill Kinzy interview, Menlo, GA, February 3, 2012. Mr. Kinzy, former principal of Chattooga High School and 22-year superintendent of Trion schools said the chair of the Trion school board told him that the Menlo and Lyerly representatives on the county school board refused to approve a new governing body without school board members specifically from Menlo and Lyerly.

from the county school systems for transfer. In addition, the receiving systems could charge students a tuition “not to exceed the per pupil amounts of local tax funds.” With this new policy in place, the Trion school board washed its hands of merging school systems and, instead, in 1974 told Mr. Bill Kinzy, former principal of Chattooga High School and the new superintendent of Trion schools, “to do whatever it takes to keep our schools open.”⁴⁵

The 1960s were a challenging time for all the schools of Chattooga County. From financial crisis, to school consolidations, to school construction and innovation, the decade was a time of overwhelming transition. For many people, the issues encountered affected more than simply education and schooling, but also community identity. In the midst of the struggles over mergers and finances, the county also was gearing up to deal with what had become one of the most controversial political and social issues of the decade—school desegregation.

The story of the desegregation of Chattooga County’s schools, and what that struggle implies about race and racial identity in this one rural southern Appalachian county reveals much about the interrelationship among race, social class, and community identity. Although the story of school desegregation in Chattooga County, not unlike that of many of the rural, mountain regions of Georgia, was seemingly uneventful at the outset, its unfolding within the county’s dual school system offers insight into the ongoing debate over desegregation and re-segregation in southern schools and what these forces reveal about racial identity. Before uncovering the specific story of Chattooga County’s experiences with school desegregation, the next chapter looks at these ongoing struggles with school desegregation and race relations in the state of Georgia as a whole. The chapter provides the backdrop against which Chattooga County entered into the struggle to desegregate its schools. To this end, it examines the actions and rhetoric of

⁴⁵ Bill Kinzy interview, February 3, 2012.

state and regional political and social leaders as they struggled to maintain separate schooling and the general racial divide that was the fabric of life in the South in the 1960s.

CHAPTER 4

SCHOOL DESEGREGATION DEBATE IN GEORGIA, 1954-1972

While schools of Chattooga County were busy dealing with the strains of budget shortfalls, consolidation, and the building of new facilities, another impending storm awaited them—the issue of school desegregation. Following the historic decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, school desegregation, as much as any other issue in the 1950s and 1960s, drove the agenda of southern policy makers and community activists alike. Although the U.S. Supreme Court declared segregated schooling unconstitutional in 1954, and issued a further order in *Brown II* that schools must desegregate “with all deliberate speed,” communities across the South continued to operate separate, and largely unequal, school systems for black and white children. For southern white leaders, the plan for maintenance of the color line in the schools largely rested in the creation of a separate, state-supported private school system that would replace the traditional public school. The story of how the South in general, and Georgia in particular, moved from the “Never” strategy, in which southern white leaders adamantly refused ever to desegregate their schools, to the gradual acceptance of the inevitability of school desegregation, provides a lens through which to view white racial identity as it affected the politics and educational policy making of the South throughout the 1960s and early 1970s. More importantly, it helps to uncover a pattern of behavior and a mindset that reflects a greater sense of continuity with the past than of change and transformation. It is this same pattern of behavior, of “perpetuating a culture,” that also would drive the story of school desegregation in Chattooga

County as its white leadership moved the schools from massive resistance, to gradual acceptance, and finally back to re-segregation.

This chapter uncovers the struggle over desegregation policy within the Southeast as a whole, and Georgia in particular. It looks at this struggle through the eyes of the wealthy and powerful state and regional political and business leaders who led the fight to maintain racially segregated schools. In particular, it examines the rhetoric of speeches, court cases, and newspapers as these venues articulated the language of white racial privilege used by those fighting to maintain the schools as one of the mainstays of that privilege.

In addition to the rhetoric of Georgia's leaders, the chapter also examines the speeches and writings of leaders of the Citizens Councils as they expressed the unspoken position of many of the South's prominent political and business leaders. Although their unwavering support for total segregation and for segregation academies was viewed, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, as an extremist view, the politicians who gave at least tacit support to this group continued to win elections in Georgia and across the Southeast. In fact, the Citizens Councils were considered "the most 'respectable' wing of the resistance movement." This loose confederation of statewide segregation associations condemned any group, including both the Ku Klux Klan and some state organizations that bore the name Citizens Council, prone to violence and willing to use illegal avenues to defy federal law, as "extremists."¹ This group, then, proves a meaningful source for understanding the often unspoken thoughts of the more prominent people associated with the massive resistance movement in the South. Though the segregation academy movement failed to take hold in areas like Chattooga County where the African American population was below

¹ Neil R. McMillen, "Preface," *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction*, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, 1971), p. xxiii.

20%, the re-segregation movement beginning in the 1980s and continuing today is evidence that alternate methods of segregation continued to dominate schooling across Georgia, the Southeast, and the nation.² Though the rhetoric of the Citizens Council, and its publication, *The Citizen*, may be considered an extremist view by some, the support the Council received from powerful southern politicians, and the accuracy of its predictions about school desegregation and re-segregation indicate the importance of studying this group for evidence of what white southerners were actually fighting so hard to protect as they struggled with the issue of school desegregation.

Segregated Schooling in Georgia

From the inception of the public education in Georgia, similar to states throughout the Southeast, wealthy and politically powerful white elites recognized public schooling as one of the best tools for perpetuating a system of racial separation and white privilege. In his classic treatment of the southern economy and southern society, W.J. Cash expressed the interrelationship between white southern leaders and public schooling.

Within the factory we shall make the South rich. And winning riches, we shall be able fully to develop the school. And with the school, we shall not only set up a potent guarantee that white men shall not sink into equality with the black, we shall also train our sons, and those of the commoners as well, to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by industrial growth and its commercial consequences, and so to make the land richer still.³

² Gary Orfield and Chungmei Lee, "Historic Reversals; Accelerating Resegregation and the Need for New Integration Strategies," A Report of the Civil Rights Project, UCLA, August 2007. This report shows that the percent of black students in majority white schools in the South, after reaching a high of 43.5% in 1988, has fallen to 27% in 2005. This is almost equal to the 23.4% 1968 level (p. 23). The percentage of black students in predominantly minority schools in the South had risen to 72% in 2005, only 9 percentage points above the 1968 figure (p. 28).

³ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1941), p. 79-80.

For Cash, the postbellum New South dream represented few significant departures from the antebellum mindset. A central aim in the establishment of public schools was “the old racist desire to keep whites and blacks in their separate places.”⁴ For wealthy and poor whites alike, the dual public education system in Georgia was designed as a guardian of white southern culture and, therefore, of white identity itself. If, after the 1954 *Brown* decision, whites were denied by the federal government their role as guardians and beneficiaries of this superior education, then powerful whites were determined to supplant the old public school system with private, segregated, state supplemented schools.

Although Georgia Governor Herman Talmadge insisted that the private school plan was “a last resort,” it was one that he and Georgia legislators were willing to use to resist any amount of school desegregation. In his 1956 address to the Georgia Commission on Education following the *Brown* decision, Governor Marvin Griffin, Talmadge’s successor, expressed the sentiment shared by popular politicians throughout the South.

In the face of decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court which seek to destroy our system of segregated schools...we are now prepared, as and when necessary... to commit the education of the children of this State to the people themselves. Through a system of private schools, organized and funded by the school patrons in the local communities, an educational structure serviceable and satisfactory to Georgians will continue as long as the people desire.⁵

The explicit aim of these private schools was to maintain the separation of the races and, thereby, to provide a better quality education for white boys and girls. Though often unspoken, the common belief among politicians, landowners, and poor working class whites across Georgia

⁴ Margaret Gladney, *I’ll Take My Stand: The Southern Segregation Academy Movement* (Ph.D. Diss., University of New Mexico, 1974), p. 8.

⁵ Marvin Griffin, “Interposition Address of Governor Marvin Griffin,” A speech given in Atlanta, GA, February 6, 1956, published by the Georgia Commission of Education, p. 1.

was that whites deserved, and had a right to expect, better quality education, along with better pay, simply because of their race.⁶

Massive resistance in Georgia

The importance to white southerners of maintaining separate schooling is visible in the ferocity with which they resisted the call for desegregation through the rapid legitimization of a fully segregated, state-sponsored private school system. Even before the Supreme Court handed down the *Brown* decision, Georgia's political leaders, under the guidance of the powerful state legislator and two-time Speaker of the Georgia House, Roy V. Harris, pushed through two resolutions at the Georgia Democratic Convention that set the state's educational policy for the next 10 years. The first resolution denounced and resolved to defy the Supreme Court's 1950 decisions in *Sweatt v. Painter* and *McLauren v. Oklahoma*, two cases requiring the desegregation of professional schools. The second resolution committed the state to fully fund the school equalization program within the framework of the separate but equal philosophy. Through these resolutions, Harris and his many supporters in the state legislature pledged to back the policy of massive resistance characteristic of the response of policy makers throughout the South to the perceived threat of school desegregation.⁷

⁶ Michelle Brattain's work on whiteness in the labor union movement in Floyd County, Georgia, the county that adjoins Chattooga to the south, examines Talmadge's use of racism to elicit votes and to help maintain local control of wages and working conditions in textile mills in the South. Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South*, (University of Georgia Press, 2004). See the speech issued by Talmadge at Rome, GA's Rotary Park, September 9, 1934, as reported in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* in which he complains about the New Deal National Recovery Act's wage scale for black workers in the state highway department.

⁷ Thomas V. O'Brien, "Georgia's Response to *Brown v. Board of Education*: The Rise and Fall of Massive Resistance, 1949-1961," Paper presented at American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993, ERIC ED 360454.

Immediately following the *Brown* decision, six southern states adopted plans for state-wide private school systems: Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Georgia.⁸ In Georgia, Governor Herman Talmadge, reading the handwriting on the wall prior to the *Brown* decision, had crafted a constitutional amendment that essentially allowed legislators to close public school systems in which desegregation occurred. Although opposed by a number of influential moderate groups in the South, including the State School Superintendent, the Georgia League of Women's Voters, and the Negro Voters League, as well as two-thirds of all daily newspapers in the state, the private school amendment was ratified by 54% of the voters.⁹

In other states across the Southeast, legislation was passed to further enable the introduction of publicly funded private schooling in the face of court-ordered public school desegregation. A number of states provided grants and loans to children in private schools and legitimated segregated private schools as a method of resisting school desegregation. The ability and the willingness of southern white elites to impose and finance a privately operated school system through public legislative channels attest to both the overwhelming political control of this group of southerners and the importance this group placed on the maintenance of a dual, unequal system of schooling. This dual educational system carried with it the continuation of the southern way of life; a way of life founded on the idea of white privilege and social control by the wealthy and powerful white elite class.

The impetus for the private school movement in the South emerged almost exclusively from wealthy and politically powerful whites, including Georgia's powerful senator, Richard B.

⁸ James M. Palmer, *The Impact of Private Education on the Rural South* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Education DHEW, February 1974), p. 11.

⁹ O'Brien, p. 10.

Russell, who refused to denounce his support for segregation even after Democratic Party leaders encouraged him to do so as a strategy for garnering national support for his 1952 presidential bid. Russell stated that he believed ending segregation would destroy the fabric of southern society.¹⁰ As such, Russell, arguably the most powerful political leader in Georgia, legitimized the notion first captured by Du Bois,¹¹ that to be southern meant to accept the psychological wage conferred on whites. Perhaps the key ingredient to this wage was that of separate schooling in which white children had free access to the best schools in town. Equal access to the best schools for black and white children would rip apart the very foundation of southern society.

A similar stand was taken by Mississippi senator, and future governor, John Bell Williams, who in response to the *Brown* decision gave a speech on the Senate floor in which he stated, “The South will never submit to integration.”¹² Expressing the sentiments of many white southern policymakers, his words became the battle cry for the development of a “Never” strategy that emphasized the legal establishment of an all-white private school system throughout the southern states before submitting to a single instance of school desegregation.

Interposition and the private school plan

In this regard, the actions of Georgia’s General Assembly after 1954 are typical of legislation passed by most southern states following the *Brown* decision.¹³ Among the earliest legislation in Georgia was a 1955 law that forbade the use of public funds for any school system

¹⁰ Sheryl B. Vogt, “Richard B. Russell,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia* online, updated: June 24, 2005.

¹¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992).

¹² Palmer, p. 11.

¹³ For a state-by-state accounting of the segregation legislation passed after 1954, an excellent source is a publication by the Southern Education Reporting Service—*A Statistical Summary, State by State of Segregation-Desegregation Activity Affecting Southern Schools from 1954 to Present* (Nashville: Southern Education Reporting Service, November 1960).

that allowed integration of the races. In conjunction with the amendment establishing private schools as a response to any forced school desegregation, the Georgia legislature authorized the lease of school property in any “city or independent school system for private educational purposes.”¹⁴ The staffing of these schools with white public schoolteachers was encouraged by the General Assembly’s decision to extend retirement benefits to those public school teachers who chose to teach in private schools. Similar to most other southern states, by the close of 1957, legislation was in place in Georgia by which to create a publicly funded, private education system, solely for the benefit of the state’s white citizens. If, because of court-ordered integration, the governor was “forced” to close schools in Georgia, then the all-white Georgia General Assembly had ensured the uninterrupted schooling of the state’s white children.

As with legislatures in other southern states, the Georgia General Assembly viewed the private school plan as the “last resort” in its efforts to protect the segregated school system. To avoid this critical choice, the state legislature followed the example of Mississippi by passing a resolution of interposition declaring the *Brown* decision null and void. According to Governor Marvin Griffin, the Supreme Court had no authority to interfere with the state’s school system. In a speech to the Georgia legislature, Griffin stated that “there is no provision in the Federal Constitution dealing with education or schools. Not one word or syllable.”¹⁵ For this reason, the governor argued, it was the obligation of the state to “interpose” its sovereign power between the Supreme Court and Georgia schools. By so doing, Griffin and the Georgia legislature believed the state could maintain its segregated schools and protect “the fundamental liberties of man” that included “the right to have a home and rear a family, to choose his own associates, to rear

¹⁴ *Georgia Laws*, 1956, Act no. 11, p. 6.

¹⁵ Marvin Griffin, “Interposition Address of Governor Marvin Griffin,” pp. 17-18.

his children according to his belief, . . . and to maintain the pride of his inheritance.”¹⁶ For Griffin, then, the separation of the races and maintenance of the color line was a fundamental right of U.S. citizenship. Maintenance of this racial separation was a key element in the white, southern power structure—a structure that he and other powerful white elites were committed to protecting.

The role established in the interposition resolution of the all-white Georgia legislators as guardians of segregated schooling was solidified in 1961 when an act passed the General Assembly legalizing the appropriation of state and local funds for tuition grants to children attending nonsectarian private schools. In this move, the power brokers of Georgia politics worked to maintain separate education for white children regardless of social class. The commitment of Georgia’s politically powerful whites to protecting the color caste, the motivation for their involvement in public education from its inception, was the great motivator in the continuing legislative battle against court-ordered desegregation. In effect, these white citizens were willing to use any means necessary—even if it meant defying federal law—to “never” submit to integration. By 1961, the “Never” policy was firmly and legally in place, and the private segregation academies were the kingpin that held this policy together.

Fear of racial amalgamation as a component of massive resistance

Although whiteness, as understood by both Du Bois and Roediger, encompassed much more than just a better quality education for white children,¹⁷ the schools became the focal point

¹⁶ “Interposition Address,” p. 33.

¹⁷ In *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois includes the following privileges as part of the “psychological wage” of whiteness. “They were given public deference and titles of courtesy because they were white. They were admitted freely with all classes of white people to public functions, public parks, and the best schools. The police were drawn from their ranks, and the courts, dependent upon their votes, treated them with such leniency as to encourage lawlessness. Their vote selected public officials, and while this had small effect upon the economic situation, it had

in the struggle to maintain white privilege because they were, for conservatives and liberals alike, “the major vehicle of society’s ideals and beliefs.”¹⁸ To understand the importance of school desegregation to white southerners, then, it is necessary to understand what these schools symbolized. *New York Times* correspondent Anthony Lewis captured a sense of the symbolism inherent in the school desegregation decision.

Men live by symbols, and school segregation was a special symbol to the white southerner. That racial separation should carry more weight in schools than elsewhere was understandable: Attendance was compulsory, and in school children of an impressionable age could not help but affect their outlook. Putting it another way, any breakdown in school segregation necessarily endangered the perpetuation of the southern myth that the Negro is by nature culturally distinct and inferior. And there was the fear—surely felt deeply by many in the South, however others regarded it—that school integration was a step toward racial intermarriage.¹⁹

Lewis’s assertion that one of the greatest fears among white southerners about school desegregation lay in the possibility of racial intermarriage is reminiscent of the writing, in the 1940s, of sociologist Gunnar Myrdal. In his observations about race relations in the United States, Myrdal asserted that social inequality and racial segregation were rooted in a single fear—the fear of racial “amalgamation.” This fear, according to Myrdal, was the “principle around which the whole structure of segregation of the Negroes—down to disfranchisement and denial of equal opportunities on the labor market—is organized.”²⁰ Myrdal realized, along with

great effect upon their personal treatment and the deference shown them”; David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso), 1993.

¹⁸ Margaret Rose Gladney, *I’ll Take My Stand*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Anthony Lewis, *New York Times, Portrait of a Decade: The Second American Revolution* (New York: Random house, 1964), p. 5.

²⁰ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, vol. II* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997), p. 587.

other historians, including Theodore Allen²¹, that racism and segregation were based on the fear of intermarriage and the resultant possibility of social equality. As discussed in following chapters, a similar theme was emphasized in interviews with Chattooga County residents in positions of responsibility during the desegregation of both school systems in the county.

The fear of “race mixing” that Myrdal saw as the source of the South’s segregated society in the first half of the twentieth century was largely responsible for the intense battle waged against school desegregation by southern politicians and educators following the 1954 *Brown* decision. Although much of the political rhetoric within the massive resistance movement was couched in the language of states’ rights and the Supreme Court’s usurpation of state and local legislative power, numerous southern educators, sociologists, and politicians, stated clearly their belief that the inevitable result of mixed race schooling was so-called miscegenation. In an effort to spread their fears to white citizens throughout the state, the Georgia Commission on Education, a commission established by the legislature in 1953 to formulate plans to ensure adequate and separate education for all of Georgia’s citizens,²² distributed a pamphlet with an article by Herbert Sass—author, historian, and Charleston, South Carolina, native—that originally appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

²¹ Theodore Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*.

²² The Georgia Commission on Education was established by a Joint resolution of the Georgia General Assembly, December 10, 1953, (House Resolution No. 232-743). The Resolution states the following about its purpose: “Whereas, the Constitution of the State provides for the separate education of the white and colored races, and Whereas, necessity for further legislation or constitutional amendments in that regard might hereafter arise;...Said commission shall formulate a plan or plans...and recommend courses of action for consideration by the General Assembly whereby the State may by taxation continue to provide adequate education for all its citizens consistent with the provisions...of the Constitution of the State of Georgia.”

Speaking for mainstream educators throughout the southern states, Sass argued against school desegregation based largely on his belief that national strength is dependent on “racial integrity.” In his article, “Mixed Schools and Mixed Blood,” Sass stated,

It is the deep conviction of nearly all white Southerners in the states which have large Negro populations that the mingling or integration of white and Negro children in the South’s primary schools would open the gates to miscegenation and widespread racial amalgamation. This belief is at the heart of our race problem, and until it is realized that this is the South’s basic and compelling motive, there can be no understanding of the South’s attitude.²³

For Sass and the Georgia Commission on Education for whom he spoke, segregated schooling was a necessary component in the maintenance of the “racial integrity” that explains the “reason why the American people...are what they are.”²⁴ Unspoken, but implied in this statement, was the conviction that U.S. society at that time was a society controlled economically and politically by a white population that enjoyed the “wages of whiteness.” The intermingling of the races would blur the well-established lines of white control.

Many southern whites agreed with Sass’s assessment that the desire for segregated schooling grew out of a preference for their own race and “a wish to keep [the race] as it is.”²⁵ In the eyes of segregationists, it was the separation of the races and the limiting of the mixed-race population that had helped make the United States the greatest of the New World countries. These same segregationists argued that white children must attend school only with children of their own race to develop the “race preference” that sometimes is not active in the very young.

Although little information is available on how widely distributed was the “Mixed Race”

²³ Herbert Ravenell Sass, “Mixed Schools and Mixed Blood,” (Atlanta, GA: Georgia Commission of Education, 1956), p. 3.

²⁴ Sass, p. 6.

²⁵ Sass, p. 7.

pamphlet distributed by the Georgia Education Commission, its ideas represented those of mainstream Georgians in positions of power and influence across the state. The chair of the commission was the governor, and its members included such prominent Georgians as the lieutenant governor, the speaker of the Georgia house, the attorney general, the chair of the university board of regents, the Chancellor of the University System of Georgia, and representatives from each of Georgia's congressional districts. The contention of this group reflected the same southern racial attitudes documented by Myrdal in the 1940s. The argument set forth by this influential group that if children of different races "were brought together intimately and constantly and grew up in close association in integrated schools..., there would be many in whom race preference would not develop," apparently was at the heart of the white southern elites' fight to avert forced school desegregation. The inevitable result of this process, according to Sass and the southern educational leaders who distributed his article, would be "mixed mating" and a "greatly enlarged mixed-blood population."²⁶

The Citizens Council and massive resistance

Determination to avoid this possible scenario was a founding principle underlying the establishment of the Citizens Council, a loose confederation of statewide associations comprised primarily of wealthy and middle class whites that, as much as any other segregationist groups, was responsible for maintaining the "Never" policy in the southern states long after the Supreme Court had declared that schools must integrate "with all deliberate speed." The Citizens Council originated in Indianola, Mississippi, when Robert Patterson met with fourteen other community leaders to organize a group that would work together to defeat the efforts of court-ordered school desegregation. Included in this group were the manager of a cotton compress, a druggist, two

²⁶ Sass, p. 9.

automobile dealers, a planter, a farmer, a ginner, a farm implement dealer, and a hardware dealer—“anyone of standing in the community.” The aim of the group was twofold: to recruit members from the same social status as these civic leaders, and to use only “legal means” to resist school desegregation.²⁷

From its beginning, this organization—the most prominent white supremacy group in the South during the 1960s—was comprised, by design, of only white middle and upper class elites. The founders were, in essence, the same men that the historian, Numan Barley, in his classic work on white southerners’ massive resistance to court-ordered desegregation, called “neo-bourbons.” Collectively, these men, primarily residents of rural areas and small towns across the Southeast, represented the “courthouse-merchant clique” that largely controlled southern politics in the 1950s. This group of southerners led the massive resistance movement and the campaign for private education in the southern states.²⁸ Although the membership of the Citizens Councils eventually was drawn from the white middle class of small towns, and, except in Jackson, Mississippi, from the lower-working class in urban areas, its leadership was comprised primarily of wealthy, powerful men, including a number of state senators and lawyers.²⁹ In Georgia, the decisions of the Citizens Council were dominated by Roy V. Harris, one of the state’s most influential leaders in areas of both politics and education. Not only did he work to elect state leaders who were themselves segregationists, but also he worked, though eventually

²⁷ Reed Sarratt, *The Ordeal of Desegregation: The First Decade* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 299.

²⁸ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 17.

²⁹ Bartley, p. 104.

unsuccessfully, as a member of the state Board of Regents, to maintain separate but equal facilities in Georgia's university system.³⁰

The significance of the Citizens Council, which in 1956 had reorganized itself as the Citizens Councils of America, is that the council, along with its nationally distributed publication, *The Citizen*, articulated the attitudes toward race and racial identity that often lay behind the veiled language of the mainstream southerners' arguments against school desegregation. While southern politicians argued that court decisions interfering with school segregation violated state sovereignty, *The Citizen*, along with state-level publications, such as Georgia's *Augusta Courier*, founded by Roy Harris, expressed openly the rationale for school segregation itself. This rationale was based both on the image of blacks as an inferior racial "other" and on the fear that integrated schooling inevitably would lead to miscegenation. Various authors in *The Citizen* during the 1960s and early 1970s argued vehemently that school integration was a threat both to racial integrity and to "good" society. To the members of the Citizens Councils, the most effective defense against this liberal attack on southern society was the institution of private, segregated academies that taught white children the principles of racial integrity and race preference.³¹

Although a number of segregation academies opened across the South in the 1950s, the academy movement reached its zenith only in the late 1960s after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and after Supreme Court decisions in 1968 and October of 1969 ended the South's slow pace toward desegregation. In these decisions, the court stated that each southern school system must

³⁰ For a recent in-depth treatment of the Citizens Council and its role in southern politics see James C. Cobb, *The South and America Since World War II*, (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³¹ Neil R. McMillen, *The Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

create a desegregation plan that “promises realistically to work now.”³² Whereas some school systems, particularly those in Appalachian areas like Chattooga County where the percentage of African American students was less than 20%, had fully desegregated before 1968, the pronouncement in 1968 of an end to all dual school systems meant that school desegregation began in earnest throughout the Southeast. The response by white southerners was overwhelming as new private academies were created overnight in communities throughout the area. The Southern Regional Council estimated that, in October of 1970, 300,000 students were attending segregated private schools in the eleven southern states. By May of 1971, the number was revised to 400,000, and for the 1971-1972 school year, the number of southern children in segregated private academies was estimated to be 535,000.³³

The end of massive resistance and the segregation academy movement

Despite most southern states, including Georgia, relinquishing the “Never” strategy by 1964, their intent was to maintain as much school desegregation as possible through various other means. For many white segregationists, especially those in areas with large African American populations, the answer was the segregated private academy. John Synon, a Citizens Council columnist, wrote that “White parents throughout the nation do not want their children to attend checkerboard schools...when classroom integration passes a given point...white children

³² *Green v. County School Board*, (391 U.S. 430, 1968). Also see *Alexander v. Holmes County Board of education*, October, 1969. This case ordered an end to dual public school systems.

³³ Kitty Terjen, “Close-Up on Segregation Academies,” *New South*, (fall 1972), p. 50. Although the proportion of students enrolled in private schools in the South remained below the national average, the increased private school enrollment resulted in significant drops in enrollment in public school between the 1969 and the 1970 school years in four southern states: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. For more information, see Kitty Terjen, “White Flight: The Segregation Academy Movement,” In Southern Regional Council, eds., *The South and Her Children: School Desegregation, 1970-1971*, (Atlanta: Southern Regional Council, 1971), p. 76.

begin their silent exodus.”³⁴ Synon’s personal observation was borne out in at least one study of changes in school enrollment patterns from the 1969 school year to the 1970 school year. This study of Alabama schools showed that, in districts where the percentage of black children was 25% or less, only about 1% of the white children withdrew to private schools. In school districts whose student population was from 26% to 50% black, 6% of the white students left. However, in districts with a black student enrollment of from 51% to 75%, one out of every 5 white students left the public schools. When the percentage of black students exceeded 75%, the number of white students exiting the public schools for private schools and other school districts rose to over 50%.³⁵

The private academies to which many rural white students fled were intended, not only to compete with the public schools but also eventually to replace the public schools entirely. The ultimate goal, according to state legislation, was the reestablishment of a dual system in which whites attended the private schools and the public schools were left for the black students. The purpose of these segregation academies was best captured in the statement of one Mississippi school official who noted that “the private all-white school is nothing new. ... We’ve had a private school system all along, but the state supported it. Now we have to find private support for it.”³⁶ Reminiscent of Cash’s earlier statement that the southern mind is “fundamentally continuous with the past”³⁷ was the realization that the private, segregated academy movement was established, not as an innovative form of private schooling, but rather as a means for

³⁴ John J. Synon, “Private Schools and the Citizens Councils,” *The Citizen*, October 1967, p. 4.

³⁵ John c. Walden and Allen D. Cleveland, “The South’s New Segregation Academies,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, (December 1971), p. 234.

³⁶ “Instant Schools,” *Newsweek*, January 26, 1970, p. 59.

³⁷ Cash, “Introduction,” p. x.

maintaining the traditional social structure of the segregated South—a structure that ensured whites the privileges associated with economic, political, and educational dominance that were part of the wages of whiteness.

For white parents in Chattooga County, the small number of black students in the county meant that a segregation academy was neither a necessity nor a viable alternative to desegregated schooling. Although a small academy, Calvary Baptist School, did open in the late 1960s, just after the county schools desegregated, its student population was small, and, overall, the public schools retained a majority of their students. By the early 1970s, however, as the laws relaxed on student transfers from the county system to the Trion City School System, growing numbers of white parents moved their children out of the Chattooga County Schools, with an African American population of just over 10%, and into the almost all-white Trion School System.

Like most white parents across the southeastern United States, parents in Chattooga County neither spoke of, nor were conscious of, the wages of whiteness as a motivating factor for sending their children to segregated schools. However, they were well aware that separate schooling for white and black children was more desirable to them than integrated schooling. In two separate studies of parent motivation for enrolling children in private, segregated academies, researchers found among parents an overarching belief that the academies offered a better quality education and a more disciplined and orderly learning environment than was available in the public schools.³⁸ Despite the deficiencies that many segregation academies were shown to have

³⁸ Jon Whitney Wiles, "Southern Alternative Schools: A Portrait," *Educational Leadership*, 29:6, March 1972, p. 534-538. Wiles studied 60 new independent schools in Florida to discover the forces behind the founding of the schools and the motivations and expectations of the parents whose children attended. John C. Walden and Allen C. Cleveland, "The South's New Segregation Academies," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 53:4, December 1971. The authors studied a sample of 140 segregation academies in Alabama in 1970 to answer questions about educational quality, parental motivations, and impact of private schooling on communities.

in both their facilities and their faculties, the study of Alabama independent schools revealed that parents believed their children received a better education in the private schools, a belief primarily based on the conviction that “quality education cannot be attained in an integrated school.”³⁹

The sentiment held by these parents was encouraged and amplified by the segregationists whose words filled the pages of *The Citizen*. Its contributors heralded the idea of separate schooling for black and white students based largely on their belief that the inherent intellectual inferiority of the black race meant that black and white children could not use the same curriculum. One of the most vocal contributors to *The Citizen*, Dr. Henry Garrett, former president of the American Psychological Association, was also one of the most avid proponents of these theories of biological determinism. In February, 1969, Garrett outlined his belief that the disparity between the performances of black and white students on mental tests was because the black race evolved more recently and was, therefore, “racially immature.” For Garrett, this “immaturity” relegated black students to a position of academic and intellectual inferiority. He explained his understanding of this phenomenon in the following passage. “In most recent human acquisition, namely the ability to think in the abstract, to reason with concepts, to use words, numbers, and the like..., the Negro race is still closer to childhood than the Caucasian.”⁴⁰

Garrett’s views of biological determinism and black inferiority—echoed by numerous contributors to *The Citizen* throughout the sixties and seventies—were not an extremist view unique to the Citizens Council. Such views are similar to those presented by federal courts in districts across the Southeast in the late 1950s and 1960s. In Georgia, this reasoning was most

³⁹ Walden and Cleveland, p. 238.

⁴⁰ Henry Garrett, “Violent Insanity in Public Education,” *The Citizen*, February 1969, p. 8.

evident in the June 1963 case of *Stell v. Chatham County Board of Education* presented in the district court of Savannah, Georgia. In the trial, the Georgia district court decided against a black student who, in light of the 1954 *Brown* decision, argued that his exclusion from the white schools of Chatham County, based solely on his race, violated his 14th Amendment right to equal protection under the law. In making its decision, the Savannah District Court relied on testimony of sociologists, psychiatrists, and archaeologists, who claimed that “variations in the intellectual abilities between Negro and white students were innate...and functionally related to physical characteristics.”⁴¹ Moreover, the court found that, because of these innate physical and psychological differences, two-thirds of black students placed within integrated classrooms would fail “to attain the existing white standards.” This failure, in turn, would lead to “attention-creating anti-social behavior” that would threaten the quality of the educational environment.⁴² For these reasons, as well as because of the so-called natural tendency toward “preferential association” among persons who share similar “physical traits,” the court concluded that education would be maximized for both white and black students through separate schooling.⁴³

For whites who had grown up in a segregated South in which their black neighbors were viewed as domestic and farm help—as objects of “utility”—the idea that blacks were genetically predetermined to be “little more than field hands” was comforting.⁴⁴ In her study of *Making Whiteness* during post-Reconstruction years, Grace Elizabeth Hale attributes this attitude of

⁴¹ *Stell v. Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education*, civil action No. 1316, U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia, Savannah Division, June 1963, p. 10-11..

⁴² *Stell v. Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education*, p. 30-31.

⁴³ *Stell v. Savannah-Chatham County Board of Education*, p. 34.

⁴⁴ Dr. T.E. Wannamaker, president of the S.C. Independent School Association, as quoted in the *Washington Post*; In Kitty Terjen, “White Flight: The Segregation Academy Movement,” p. 76.

whites to part of their attempt to maintain social control by depicting African Americans as dependents who must rely on the paternalistic support of whites for their existence. According to Hale, the purpose of Jim Crow, for which separate schooling played a large part, was to maintain the racial solidarity of poor and elite whites alike by denying black men and women the right to become their own masters.⁴⁵ In essence, this desire to continue the myth of the white elite as the master over the inferior black worker focused attention away from the possibility of class solidarity to that of race solidarity. Maintenance of this sense of white solidarity required the continued public separation of the races, and, as stated by one resident who grew up in Chattooga County in the 1960s, a continuous notion that everyone “knew his place,”⁴⁶ and that “place” was based upon skin color. Thus, the color line, of which segregated schooling was the most significant guardian, reminded black and white southerners alike of the gulf that existed between the black man and woman and the rest of humanity.⁴⁷

Limited school desegregation comes to Georgia

For the white elite leadership of the southern states, as well as for white southerners in general, the separation of the races simply was part of the “natural order.” When, in 1961, a federal district judge ordered the admission of two black students, Charlayne Hunter and Hamilton Holmes, to the University of Georgia, Governor Ernest Vandiver was faced with the decision either to follow the legislation set in place under the Talmadge and Griffin Administrations to shut down the university rather than to integrate or to follow the direction of the district court. In his address to a Joint Session of the Georgia General Assembly on January

⁴⁵ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, Dissertation submitted to the Graduate School of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, October 1995, p. 15-16.

⁴⁶ Interview with Milford Morgan, in his home in Summerville, Georgia, February 2012.

⁴⁷ Hale, p. 15-20.

12, 1961 about this urgent situation, Vandiver laid out, not only the legislative tack that he believed the state should follow, but also the segregationist reasoning behind this course of action. What is evident in Vandiver's speech is that his beliefs, similar to those of whites throughout the state of Georgia, remained staunchly segregationist. The decision to comply with the federal court order and to abandon the "Never" strategy was viewed by Vandiver, as well as by business and political leaders across the state, as a way to appease the federal government while also maintaining local control over a segregated public school system.

Claiming to speak on behalf of all Georgians, who, Vandiver asserted, "hold fast to a common heritage," the governor proclaimed the following. "Ingrained in each of us is the deep, personal, unchangeable conviction that separate public education—segregated facilities—not only are best, but are mandatory, . . . , if peaceful relations are to continue between the two races as they have in the past."⁴⁸ Like most white politicians across the Southeast, Georgia's chief executive claimed that he spoke for black as well as white citizens when he contended that "Separate education—segregated facilities—are our objectives, first, last, and always."⁴⁹ Compliance with the courts, then, was not an indication of acquiescence on the part of white state leadership on separate schooling for black and white children in Georgia; it was merely the best means to maintain control over the state school system, and, thereby, insure segregated schooling in most systems throughout the state. This "token desegregation," as Numan Bartley labeled it, on the part of the governor and the legislators was intended as a way to keep the federal courts out of Georgia and its segregated school systems. It represented less of a break

⁴⁸ Gov. Ernest Vandiver's "Public Education Address" before a Joint Session of the Georgia General Assembly, January 18, 1961, in Georgia Archives, p. 4.

⁴⁹ "Public Education Address," p. 7.

with the past than a “conservative reaction in defense of southern continuity.” Beginning with the desegregation of the University of Georgia in 1961, however, these minimal efforts at desegregation grew more from a desire for “social stability” than for “social change.”⁵⁰

The sentiments expressed by Governor Vandiver varied little from those advocated by the leaders of the Citizens Council such as William Simmons who suggested that segregation followed the law of nature and that desegregation upset the very balance of nature. In his speech to the graduating class at one of Jackson, Mississippi’s first Council High Schools, Simmons stated the following. “What is wrong with people preferring to associate with their own kind? If anything has been characteristic of human behavior...from the beginning of life on this earth it has been the instinct for like to seek like.”⁵¹ Likewise, Gov. Vandiver made a similar point about separate education for the races in his speech defending the necessity of following court-ordered desegregation of the University of Georgia. “Compulsory association of the races through enforced integration would be detrimental to the peace, good order, and tranquility of the State and detrimental to progress, harmony, and good relations between the races.”⁵²

For Vandiver and other white elites in Georgia, and throughout the southeastern United States, segregated schooling represented the key to social order—a political and social order based upon white control and white supremacy. Dismantling segregated school systems, for whites across the South, threatened to unravel the whole basis of southern society that bestowed on whites a superior rank, regardless of wealth or character, simply because they were white. This “psychological wage” was what was at stake in the struggle over school desegregation. If

⁵⁰ Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1969) p. 343.

⁵¹ William Simmons, “Council Schools; ‘Wave of the Future’,” *The Citizen*, July-August 1972.

⁵² “Public Education Address,” p. 8.

the federal courts were determined to dismantle this system, then politically and socially powerful white leaders would find a new path through which to maintain it. In the years following their retreat from massive resistance, this path took many routes from that of segregation academies, to tracking within the curriculum, to the transfer of white students to all-white districts. Regardless of the path taken, the result was the same—continued segregation of schoolchildren of different races.

The Sibley Commission

Evidence for the motives of Vandiver and other Georgia political leaders in the early 1960s is found in the story of Georgia's Sibley Commission. Following a 1959 District Court ruling that called for the desegregation of the Atlanta Public School System, the governor was forced to decide either to follow the court ruling or to close the Atlanta schools. Not wishing to follow either course, Governor Vandiver established the General Assembly Commission on Schools, or Sibley Commission, charged with touring the state to gather testimony from Georgia voters about the issue of school desegregation and school closing. Jeff Roche, in his work, *Restructured Resistance*, outlines the political maneuvering of John Sibley and his orchestration of the commission's work in a direction that steered Georgia's white electorate away from the road of massive resistance toward a path of nominal desegregation. A segregationist at heart, Sibley understood that avoiding desegregation at all costs would spell disaster for Georgia's twentieth century economic modernization. Despite the Commission's findings that 60% of the commission's witnesses preferred total segregation, even in the face of school closings,⁵³ Sibley presented a compromise position to the general assembly whereby individual school systems

⁵³ Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia*, "Introduction," (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1998), p. xiv.

could determine their own path toward desegregation without requiring the governor to close the schools. In this way, Sibley protected both Georgia's national reputation and its predominantly segregated public school system. This movement toward "restructured resistance" was less indicative of a shift in racial attitudes among Georgia's political leaders or its white electorate than an indication of a shift in Georgia's white political power structure from control by the rural agricultural elite to control by the urban and suburban white business elites. The irony for Georgia, as well as for most other southern states in the middle and late 1960s, was that the decision to end complete resistance to school desegregation was led by men who were themselves segregationists. Speaking on the need for token desegregation plans in Georgia, Governor Carl Sanders, Vandiver's successor in the Governor's office, assured a crowd of Georgia voters during the course of his campaign, "I am a segregationist, but not a damned fool."⁵⁴

In their struggle to maintain segregated schooling in the decades following *Brown*, men within groups like the Citizens Council expressed attitudes that may be characterized as ultra-conservative, or more extremist, than the typical white upper and middle class southerner. The group's private school movement, though doubling its enrollment throughout the early 1970s, actually educated only about 6.2% of the South's school age children.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the views expressed by segregation academy advocates were indicative of the mood of the white southerner at that time. Even in public school systems that remained open and thrived throughout

⁵⁴ Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press 1998).

⁵⁵ Terjen, p. 51. This figure is only an estimate and includes children in all types of private schools.

the 1970s, segregation continued through the use of tracking.⁵⁶ As Bryan Deever argues in his study of school desegregation in Bulloch County, Georgia, white southern leaders, on both a state and local level, never relinquished their “relational dominance” in the schools and the community: they were able simply to alter how that dominance was “articulated.”⁵⁷ Despite court-ordered desegregation plans, the power structure in many rural Georgia counties remained intact at the end of the 1960s and remains that way today.⁵⁸ The power structure within school systems has remained constant; only the pathways through which that power is wielded have changed.

De jure, Not de facto Desegregation in Georgia

The arguments of those who openly advocated a continuation of the schools as a means by which southern whites might maintain their dominance and control over a segregated society were, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, largely left to organizations such as the Citizens Council. Despite the acceptance of *de jure* desegregation in Georgia and throughout the Southeast, it is difficult to regard either the writers of *The Citizen*, or the views they represented, as more radical than the majority of the white voting populace since among the council’s supporters were some of the most powerful politicians in the South—Lester Maddox, Jesse Helms, and George Wallace. Perhaps these writers expressed openly the beliefs of white superiority and black inferiority that more moderate whites disguised as opposition to bussing or

⁵⁶ Bryan Deever, “Desegregation in a Southern School System, 1968-1974: Power/Resistance and the Discourse of Exclusion,” *Journal of Education* 174, p. 66-88. Deever also discusses the segregation of teachers in integrated schools in Bulloch County, Georgia. Administrators never allowed black teachers to teach the upper level, predominantly white, classes. Elizabeth Ann Rowley, “Ethnographic Study of a North Georgian County Elementary School Twelve Years Post *de jure*,” diss., 1983.

⁵⁷ “Desegregation in a Southern School System,” p. 49.

⁵⁸ For evidence of contemporary *de facto* segregation see Bryan Deever, “Living *Plessey* in the Context of *Brown*,” *Urban Review* 26:4, December 1994, p. 273-288.

school violence. In effect, what most southern whites opposed was integration itself because it threatened the traditional southern way of life—a way of life that guaranteed whites a certain social, political, and economic status—the psychological and material wages of whiteness.

The acceptance of the seemingly radical views of the Citizens Council about segregated schooling is evident in the council's relationship with regional leaders. Although most prominent southern governors never joined the councils, they repeatedly served as keynote speakers at the Annual Citizens Council Leadership Conferences. At these meetings, the governors applauded the council for its promotion of segregation and the independent school movement. In his address to the 1969 Leadership Conference in Jackson, Mississippi, for example, Georgia Governor Lester Maddox told his audience that as long as their organization continued to stand for “America, constitutional government, and liberty, Lester Maddox will continue to stand with you...The Citizens Council has been labeled a ‘segregationist organization.’ Well, what’s wrong with that? I’m a segregationist and proud of it.”⁵⁹ What Maddox implied in his speech was that “standing for America” included support of the idea of a racial hierarchy with whites in a position of superiority over blacks.

In contrast to the arguments of the leaders of the Citizens Council, Maddox’s public rhetoric, similar to that of Herman Talmadge almost twenty years earlier, focused almost exclusively on the right of parents and their elected officials to control schooling in their own states. However, his enthusiastic promotion of the council and his invitation for them to meet in Atlanta for their 1970 convention were indicative of his support for their various white supremacist principles, especially in his advocacy of segregation academies for white children.

⁵⁹ Lester Maddox, “Speech to Citizens Council of America,” 1969 Leadership Conference, Jackson, Mississippi, August 29, 1969; in *The Speeches of Governor Lester Maddox*, (Atlanta, Ga., 1972), p. 342.

Not only did Maddox speak at a number of opening day ceremonies for private segregation academies in rural areas across the Southeast, but he also advocated private schooling as the answer to the South's education crisis long after the years of massive resistance had passed.

In his role as Georgia's chief executive, representing both black and white citizens of the state, Governor Maddox made bold statements in support of private segregated schooling for Georgia's white children. During his State of the State Address before the Georgia General Assembly on January 13, 1970, Maddox proclaimed, "I thank God for private education and I am thankful that so many are so blessed with the ability to send their children to private schools thus protecting them from the intolerable conditions facing children in many public schools."⁶⁰

Although Maddox continually spoke of his belief that segregated schooling was best for children of both races, his support of organizations whose express purpose was that of white supremacy and racial integrity revealed Maddox's, and other prominent southern politicians', motives for promoting segregated schooling and states rights. What Maddox and other politically powerful southerners desired was the maintenance of the race-based social hierarchy on which the segregated South was built. Perhaps Maddox came closest to expressing this sentiment early in his term of office when he spoke at Lilburn Elementary School in Dekalb County, Georgia. In his speech, the governor complained that the federal government was "using the club of federal funds...[to call] upon America to place dollars ahead of the welfare and education of our children. ...All those who allow themselves to be led by the nose down the path of racial amalgamation are placing a price tag on their children."⁶¹ Reiterating a cry made by southern

⁶⁰ Lester Maddox, "The State of the State Address," January 13, 1970, In *The Speeches of Governor Lester Maddox*, p. 342.

⁶¹ Lester Maddox, "Speech to Lilburn Elementary School," December 11, 1968, In *The Speeches of Governor Lester Maddox*, p. 237.

white elites since before the *Brown* decision, Maddox made clear that, for southern whites, at the heart of the school desegregation debate was the desire to protect the racial integrity they saw as essential to the continuation of white privilege.

Despite a barrage of Supreme Court rulings designed to strike down nearly every aspect of these segregation academies, many of them established in the late 1960s continued to benefit from state-sanctioned aid, providing evidence of the support these segregated schools continued to garner from prominent white southern political leaders.⁶² Although working class whites often are characterized as the most racist members of southern white communities, continued support for segregated schooling in general, and segregation academies in particular, came primarily from middle and upper class whites. This occurred, not only on a local level, but also on the state level where powerful politicians and local government officials worked together to ensure the success of segregation academies and other forms of segregated schooling across the southeastern United States.

One of the greatest government-sanctioned advantages of segregation academies was the tax exempt status they enjoyed until a policy change in July of 1970 when the Internal Revenue Service stated it could “no longer legally justify allowing tax-exempt status to private schools which practice racial discrimination. Nor can it treat gifts to such schools as charitable deductions.”⁶³ The spirit of this proclamation was honorable, but the enforcement was weak. Kitty Terjen reported that, because the Internal Revenue Service accepted “good faith” statements from these academies as proof that they were not involved in discriminatory practices,

⁶² See Anthony Champagne, “The Segregation Academy and the Law,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 42, Fall 1972, p. 61-62. This article describes a Louisiana academy in which land was donated by a retired public school principal, and desks and other equipment were “donated” by the local public school board.

⁶³ As quoted in Kitty Terjen, *White Flight: The Segregation Academy Movement*, p. 72.

the segregation academies simply printed advertisements in the local newspaper that they were open to persons of all races. However, an investigation by U.S. Senator Walter Mondale's Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity revealed that numerous tax exempt private schools actually were members of the openly segregationist Southern Independent School Association. Despite repeated efforts by the federal government to remove private schools from the business of resegregation, agents found enforcement of the tax codes almost impossible since white academies claimed nondiscriminatory enrollment policies when, in reality, they used methods of intimidation to discourage African American students from applying.⁶⁴ In many respects, a similar pattern would be followed by the publicly funded Trion City School system during the 1970s and 1980s as it encouraged the enrollment of tuition-paying students from adjoining county school systems.

Motivation for continued segregated schooling in southern states is evident in the laws these states passed to protect legal means of segregation as the country moved along a continuum from the period of the "Never" policy, through the era of massive resistance, to the time of token desegregation, to a period of total *de jure* school desegregation, and finally to the current stage of resegregation of southern schools. The academy movement was one expression of the South's commitment to "never submit to integration." Even though the original plan by southern states to continue their separate school systems through a network of private, segregated schools never came to fruition, the segregation academies that dotted the landscape of the Southeast were, in the 1960s and 1970s, and in large part remain today, a major component of a public school system that was neither integrated nor fully desegregated. The motives behind the original

⁶⁴ For an example of this coercion, see Terjen's *White Flight*. She offers evidence of an African American man who went to enroll his children in Heritage Academy in Newnan, Georgia. The children were turned down despite this academy being one of those offered tax exemption by the IRS based on its "good faith" statement.

segregation academy movement reveal much of the unspoken truth about whiteness prevalent in southern towns throughout the years of court-ordered desegregation. What was the impetus for this movement? It is best expressed by Dr. T.E. Wannamker in a statement to the Columbia, South Carolina, *State and Record* in July of 1966. “We’re here because we have convictions—and we’re going to stay. It’s not token integration we’re concerned about, but the effects mass integration will have on our schools in the future. ...The immediate concern is this heavy ratio, the future concern is amalgamation of the races...”⁶⁵

Although fear of interracial dating, and ultimately racial amalgamation, stirred the passions of southern whites from all economic classes, continued school segregation in the South was made possible by the legal protection provided by the politically powerful group of middle class and wealthy white leaders who feared that an integrated society would destroy the social order by which it maintained control over southern economics and politics. The root cause of fear for the South’s leaders, then, both locally and state-wide, was not simply racial amalgamation, but a fear of change. Medford Evans, a university professor and managing editor of *The Citizen*, best captured this when he wrote that, unlike the desegregated public schools, whose stated goal was “to transform a culture,” the goal of the segregated private schools was “not to transform a culture, but to perpetuate it.”⁶⁶ Quite simply, the culture that the politically powerful whites fought hard to preserve was one in which they controlled the social hierarchy through the maintenance of a color line that reminded all individuals, white and black alike, of their “place in society.”

⁶⁵ T.E. Wannamaker, as quoted in the Columbia *State and Record*, July 10, 1966.

⁶⁶ Medford Evans, “Citizen Power and Private Education,” *The Citizen*, December 1970, p. 14.

Maintenance of this hierarchal society, grounded in racism and white privilege, was dependent on the continued separation of the races and the ability of whites to deny African Americans mastery over their own lives.⁶⁷ School integration threatened that system. School integration and equal educational opportunity for all persons, regardless of color, opened the door to both the possibility of diminished economic and political power for wealthy whites and the loss of social status for poor whites. In the 1960s and early 1970s, this was a prospect that white southern leaders refused to accept. As such, these leaders found legal means through which to perpetuate an educational system that always had been both separate and unequal.

Following the Supreme Court's decision in the 1969 case of *Alexander v. Holmes* striking down any remnants of a dual school system for the races, an editorial in *The Citizen* predicted the reaction of white southerners to the prospect of actual school desegregation. The editorial made the following assertion:

Thus we have moved from segregation to "freedom of choice" to compulsory integration. ...From this point on, it will be approaching segregation again. Massive resistance will grow. ...After a few years of turmoil, the South will follow the Northern example. ...Its government schools will be black. Its private schools will be white.⁶⁸

Although this editorialist may have envisioned a more pervasive segregation academy movement in the South than what exists today, his predictions about the perpetuation of segregated schooling, and the resegregation of southern schools, are largely a fact of life in rural areas where growing numbers of white children continue to exit the public schools within their districts for

⁶⁷ In *Making Whiteness*, Hale argues that the purpose of the color line was not to prevent social equality, but to deny African-American men and women the ability to become their own masters. Through Jim Crow, whites continued to tell blacks where to sit, eat, live, and attend school. To justify this legalized racism, whites created, in literature and popular culture, the myth of the "comic, contented" and loyal former slave who accepted and appreciated his or her place as a dependent.

⁶⁸ "Black Wednesday," *The Citizen*, December 1969, p. 2.

more highly segregated public and private school alternatives. This trend in Chattooga County, played out in the transfer of middle class white county students to the Trion City School System, is examined in the next chapter.

Like white parents today, during the segregation academy movement of the 1960s and 1970s, parents who removed their students from public schooling claimed that they desired a “better quality education” for their children. For many parents, this meant an education that resembled the one they had received as children. What is evident from the study of both the era of massive resistance and the period of the segregation academy movement is that what parents actually desired was the “perpetuation of a culture”—a culture based on white privilege and separation of the races. The desire to protect what many white leaders referred to as “racial integrity” that constituted much of the rhetoric surrounding the struggle over school desegregation grew from the desire to sustain white economic and political power through continuation of white privilege. Because attending “the best schools ... [and] schoolhouses ... [that] were the best in the community, and conspicuously placed, and ... cost anywhere from twice to ten times as much per capita as the colored schools” was one of the most powerful symbols of whiteness in the South, maintenance of this symbol became the major obstacle to development of equal, integrated education in the southern United States.⁶⁹

This same trend is evident in areas across the Southeast today regardless of population and demographics. Even in areas like Chattooga County, where whites make up an overwhelming majority of the population, the desire to maintain separate schooling and to continue the educational patterns of the past—patterns grounded in segregation and white privilege—has proven to be an obstacle to true school integration. Although today the Trion

⁶⁹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum, 1992) 700-701.

School System receives public funds along with countless awards and recognitions for student achievements, the story of how this small mill school emerged from the verge of shutting down and merging with the larger, academically and athletically stronger, Chattooga County System, to become the county's school of choice is one that says much about what it means to be white in this rural Appalachian community, and about the strong desire to perpetuate the racially segregated past. As the next chapter reveals the unfolding story of school desegregation in Chattooga County, it sheds light into the forces that shaped the attitudes toward schooling, community, and race that impacted this unique small, Appalachian county's struggle with school desegregation.

CHAPTER 5

RACE RELATIONS IN CHATTOOGA COUNTY, 1950s-1960s

The schools of Chattooga County were in no way immune to the firestorm of activity swirling around them in the South's struggles over the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. As the county entered the decade of the 1960s, it grew increasingly apparent to all those involved in politics and education that the steady cadence toward school desegregation was reaching its ultimate conclusion. With the integration, first, of the University of Georgia in 1961, and, second, of the Atlanta City Schools in 1961, Georgia's political leaders had relinquished their seemingly immutable hold on Massive Resistance, and replaced it with what historian Jeff Roche, in his work on the Sibley Commission, called "Restructured Resistance." This new path, "an elusive plan to preserve public education while preserving segregation," allowed schools, particularly those like Chattooga County, in Georgia's mountain region, where African Americans made up less than 15% of the county's population, to adhere with the letter, if not the spirit of the law, by choosing their own paths toward token desegregation.¹ How this small county in Appalachian Northwest Georgia became one of the earliest school systems in the state to desegregate, how race relations in this small county impacted reactions toward desegregation, how this desegregation actually unfolded, the impact of this social change on the white community of Chattooga County, and what these actions and

¹ Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance; The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia*, (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), p. 91.

events imply about race relations and white racial identity during this time of racial transition and community change, are the stories these next two chapters relate.

Movement Toward School Desegregation in Chattooga County

Mr. William Penn Selman had chaired the Chattooga County School Board throughout the stormy years of school consolidation. He recalled the harassment he and his family had endured over the consolidation of the Menlo and Lyerly High Schools with Summerville High School. For weeks during the school consolidation ordeal, he and his wife were awakened each night at midnight by callers who would hang up as soon as he answered the phone. The level of anger toward Mr. Selman and the county school board was such that Mrs. Selman hid her last name from her sons' barber, a Menlo resident, for fear he might harm her children. Like school superintendent James Spence, Mr. Selman believed that school consolidation was the most difficult task he had endured in his role as Chattooga County School Board Chair.² By 1965, with the building of the new modernized Chattooga High School, the county schools seemed to be on the road to recovery and healing. However, Mr. Selman and the other board members were aware of another obstacle they would have to face. With the publication of the Sibley Commission Report in 1961 along with the token desegregation of both the University of Georgia and the Atlanta City Schools, Selman knew it was simply a matter of time before Chattooga County Schools must address the potentially explosive issue of school desegregation.

For Selman and Superintendent Spence alike, the inevitability of school desegregation became most apparent with passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 authorizing the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) to design specific guidelines by which to measure a school system's compliance with school desegregation. In addition, the act gave HEW

² Interview with Mr. William P. Selman in his home in Pennville, Georgia, April 16, 2012.

the power to withhold federal funding to any school districts that failed to meet these guidelines. For Chattooga County, in 1965, this amounted to funds in excess of \$85,000. Similarly, the Trion Schools would lose around \$10,000 in funding if they failed to comply. For this reason, at a called school board meeting on February 23, 1965, the Chattooga County Board of Education signed the Assurance of Compliance Letter just as the Trion Board had done the week before. Although the county board had not yet designed a plan for school desegregation, this was the first step toward that eventuality.³

Prior to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Chattooga County School Board, like numerous school districts across the state, had attempted to avoid desegregation by following the direction of Georgia's political leaders who encouraged improvements to the facilities of the all-black schools as a way to appease both the courts and the African American community. The use of school improvement as a band aid to the systemic inequality inherent in Georgia's legally segregated schools was part of Herman Talmadge's educational policy of the 1950s in which "he promised to increase funding and eventual equalization for black schools" while also threatening to close the public school system entirely if any school began to desegregate.⁴ In Chattooga County, these improvements took the form of new classrooms at the A.C. Carter School in Summerville and improved facilities at the all-black Holland School in the southwest part of the county. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the county's notice that these

³ "Chattooga Board Signs Assurance," *The Summerville News*, February 25, 1965, p. 2A.; "Trion Board Signs Compliance," *The Summerville News*, February 18, 1965, p. 5A.; Chattooga School Board *Minutes*, February 23, 1965.; Trion School Board *Minutes*, February 16, 1965.

⁴ O'Brien, Thomas V., "Georgia's Response to *Brown v. Board of Education*; The Rise and Fall of Massive Resistance, 1949-1961," Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta, GA, April 12-16, 1993, ERIC ED 360454.

token improvements would no longer satisfy the U.S. Federal Government in its quest to enforce school desegregation.

For this reason Bill Selman decided, in 1966, that the time had come to make the decision. He recalled that a man from Boston representing the Federal Attorney General's office came to Chattooga County and traveled with the board members to town meetings in each of the areas of the school system. The U.S. Justice Department representative, Steve Trackenberg, presented all the information on Federal requirements and helped field questions from the public. Mr. Selman recalled that all the meetings were peaceful and helped pave the way for the final decision. Learning a lesson from the school consolidation conflict, Selman made the following observation. "I was not going to present the issue of integration at the school board meeting until I knew for sure we would have a unanimous vote in favor." Hoping to stay out of the public eye, Mr. Selman took all the board members to eat at a restaurant in Rome and asked them how they would vote on the issue. Every one of the board member was, according to Mr. Selman, "dead set against it." He told the men that he was unwilling to vote on the issue until "everyone is for it." Mr. Selman told the board members, "I'm not gonna let this thing come up to a vote unless everyone of you is for it. I want it unanimous. And everyone of 'em was dead set against it." Selman told the board members he didn't want it either, but he was willing to vote yes because "It was either that or go to jail!"⁵

Not receiving the unanimous affirmation he had hoped for, the school board chair entered Summerville Court House on the night of April 10, 1966, uncertain of the outcome of the meeting. He described this momentous occasion in Chattooga County's history in the following words.

⁵ Selman interview.

When the time came, I looked at Jack [Jackson, the board member from Menlo] and I said, “Are y’all ready to vote on this thing?” And Jack says, “Bring it up.” I said, “Okay, we’re gonna vote next on integration.” Jack said, “I move that we integrate the schools one hundred percent.” I said, “All those in favor raise your right hand.” Everyone raised his right hand, and with that it was over with. No discussion.⁶

With little fanfare and no discussion, one hundred years of legally segregated schooling came to a close in Chattooga County, Georgia.

Race Relations in Chattooga County Prior to School Desegregation

Although most Chattooga County residents viewed themselves as southern rather than Appalachian, the county’s unique experience with race is shaped by its geographic and cultural ties with these overlapping regions. As proposed by numerous Appalachian scholars, this dual identity is largely responsible for the complexity of life in the southern Appalachian region. Though squarely southern, areas in the mountain South, such as Chattooga County, have a history and experience with race unlike that of rural southern lowland counties. The story of Chattooga County’s experience with race and racial identity reflects much of this complexity.⁷ Recently, sociologists like Larry Griffin have discovered that, instead of the traditional view of Appalachia as a land of greater racial tolerance and “racial innocence,” it is not so unlike the lowland South where race “continues to mold southern identity and [for whites] what it means to

⁶ Selman interview.

⁷ John Inscoc addresses the historical roots of the complex identity of southern Appalachian regions as both purely southern and purely mountain in several of his writings. Included in these works are: John Inscoc, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South*, (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008); *Mountain masters: Slavery and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina*, (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996).

be a southerner.”⁸ The experience of race and community, at least through the eyes Chattooga County’s white residents in the 1960s and 1970s, seemed to follow a similar pattern.

When W.E.B. Du Bois described the advantages conferred on whites as the “public and psychological” wages of whiteness, he might have been describing life in Chattooga County in the 1950s and 1960s. As portrayed through both individual memories as well as newspaper and other documents, Chattooga County operated according to a two-tiered class based largely on race. Although there were definite economic class divisions in place within the white community—between mill management, merchants, and professional people on the one side, and mill workers and farm laborers on the other—it was the racial divide that was immutable. Whites could rise from farm laborers to merchant, or from mill worker to management, from one generation to another. However, regardless of education, wealth, or character, a black person in Chattooga County in the 1950s and 1960s was considered second class. As Milford Morgan stated, “It was sorta like everybody knew their place.”⁹

Downtown Summerville in the 1950s and 1960s was a bustling commercial area. Everyone interviewed would agree with Larry Parker when he said, “Everything you wanted was in Summerville—four grocery stores, clothes stores, Jackson and McGinnis Drugs, Home Store, at least five restaurants or diners. There was a service station on every corner.”¹⁰ At that time, few people left the county for entertainment because the town had its own movie theatre, The Tooga. Although some of the wealthier citizens drove to Rome for big shopping trips, and some, like Gene McGinnis’s family, rode the bus to Atlanta to shop at Rich’s, most young people lived

⁸ Larry J. Griffin, “Whiteness and Southern Identity in the Mountain and Lowland South,” *Journal of Appalachian Studies*, vol 10, No. 1 & 2, Spring/Fall 2004.

⁹ Milford Morgan interview.

¹⁰ Interview with Larry Parker in Summerville, GA, June 12, 2012.

their lives within the confines of Chattooga County. As Larry Parker explained it, “We didn’t have cars. You didn’t leave Chattooga County. I never ate any spaghetti until [Margaret] and I got married. We didn’t know what pizza was.”¹¹

For the white community, Summerville was not only the commercial center, but also the center of social interaction for both young people and their parents or grandparents. In addition to the movies, elementary and junior high school students from Summerville often rode their bikes to town after school so they could hang out with friends and buy candy from the service stations or drug stores. According to a number of people who lived in Summerville and whose parents either owned stores in the area or served as managers of the mills, it was “just an easy way and place to grow up.”¹² Several people also recalled spending most of their summer days at the public swimming pool, or at dances sponsored by the “C” Club (the letterman club for Chattooga High School). Many of the “more prominent men in town” would gather around the pot-bellied stove at McWhorter’s Seed and Feed or at Morgan’s Timber and Coal store to reminisce and discuss the political and social events of the day. Milford Morgan, whose grandfather owned Morgan’s Timber and Coal store, recalled that the men who socialized at McWhorter’s and Morgan’s included lawyers, merchants, the bank president, and doctors in town.

For those white people who lived outside Summerville, or whose parents were mill workers and small farmers, trips to the county seat town were less common. One Trion graduate, whose parents were mill workers and farmers, and who later became Chattooga County School Superintendent, said that for him going to downtown Summerville was “a big deal.” He and his

¹¹ Larry Parker interview.

¹² Morgan interview; Interview with Suzanne Williams Lanier, in Summerville, GA, June 27, 2006.

father raised chickens and he would go to town to drop off eggs at the supermarket. He also remembered going to McWhorter's Farm Supply and going to Shamblin's Hardware Store where they would sometimes let him run the cash register. His father would give him an allowance of 25 cents that he used to buy trains and train track at the Western Auto. In general, he remembers Summerville as a "nurturing environment" for a child.¹³

For many of the Chattooga County white children, whose parents were farmers and mill workers, much of their time outside school was spent working. Larry Parker remembered working on the farm after school while his mother and father worked at the Georgia Rug Mill. Many small farmers in the county worked as wage laborers in the mills to help with expenses. Similarly, for Mike Poole, whose father and mother both worked at a variety of jobs in the Trion Mill and elsewhere in the community, work was a way of life. He said that from the time he was seven years old he would leave home in the morning and be gone the rest of the day either hunting and fishing or working out in a field. He remembered having jobs as a young boy that ranged from newspaper delivery to hoeing cotton. Most of these folks considered themselves neither poor nor middle class. According to Mr. Parker, "We were just the same as everybody else. We never lacked for food." Although Parker says he never thought much about how much money his family had, he admitted that by today's standards they were probably poor. Recalling what Christmas was like as a child, he remembered that "in your stocking you'd have like oranges and apples, some firecrackers, and a few tinker toys. That was a pretty good Christmas."¹⁴ Although these small farmers and mill laborers were not considered part of the "prominent" members of Chattooga society, as white land owners their economic status was

¹³ Interview with Mike Poole in Summerville, GA, June 29, 2006.

¹⁴ Poole interview; Larry Parker interview.

higher than others in the county who lived on other people's land and supported themselves either as tenant farmers or day laborers.

Moderate Views Toward Race Relations

Typical of much of rural southern Appalachia, Chattooga County had a relatively small African American population and, as perceived by most members of the white community, the county maintained relatively stable relations between the black and the white communities. Many Appalachian scholars traditionally have claimed that throughout the Appalachian region a sort of unique relationship existed between the white and black communities.¹⁵ Similarly, Jeff Roche's examination of the Sibley Commission hearings found that one of the greatest divides in the state on attitudes about school desegregation was that between the counties in south Georgia and those in the mountain region. Throughout Chattooga's history there was some evidence of racial tolerance. One incident in the 1950s in particular illustrates the more moderate racial attitudes of the white residents of Chattooga County. In November of 1956, the Chattooga County Junior Chamber of Commerce scheduled a football game between "Summerville and Lafayette Negro High Schools"¹⁶ to take place on the football field of the all-white Summerville High School. The local KKK formally protested the use of the field by black teams leading the Chattooga County School Board to ask for advice on the matter from the state Attorney General's office. On the advice of Georgia Attorney General Eugene Cook, the Chattooga board padlocked the stadium gates and cancelled the use of the stadium for the game. In response to the board's decision, the United Press reported that a crowd of 1500 gathered outside the football

¹⁵ D. Corbin, *Life, Work, and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Mines, 1880-1920*. Corbin claims that conditions in the coal fields created a militant working class unaffected by racial divisions. More recent historians dispute that assumption.

¹⁶ "Tickets on Sale for Negro Football Game," *The Summerville News*, November 8, 1956, p. 1A.

stadium and “denounced state officials who forced cancellation of the Negro football game.”¹⁷ President of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, Charles Farrar, a member of a prominent white family in town, reportedly told the crowd, “We will not be intimidated by the Klan or Mr. Cook.”¹⁸

Similar reactions to extremist views in Chattooga County were noted by several county residents who recalled that a scheduled march by the KKK was thwarted when, on the day of the march, all the businesses in Summerville shut down to show their disapproval of the march and to keep shoppers out of downtown Summerville. When the KKK appeared, there were no spectators along the route to watch.¹⁹ Linda Hawkins, whose father was a black farmer in the Gore community of Chattooga County, though always aware of the two-tiered society in which she lived, similarly recalled a time when the KKK was riding through her community, yelling and shooting up in the air. Her father went to the sheriff’s office to report the behavior. He told the sheriff that he had to protect his family. Ms Hawkins remembered her father telling that the sheriff had assured him, “You gotta protect your family. Try not to kill anybody, but you gotta protect your family.”²⁰ There is no record that the sheriff took any actions against the people involved in the incidents, but, Ms Hawkins recalled, the behavior stopped soon after her father’s visit to the sheriff.

¹⁷ “Negro Game Ban Protested,” *Deseret News and Telegram*, UPI, November 30, 1956. Significantly, this event received no coverage in the local newspaper other than two lines in *The Summerville News*, November 29, 1956, that read, “Due to unclarified rumors from the state AG’s office, the football game between Summerville and LaFayette colored teams has been indefinitely postponed.”

¹⁸ “Negro Game Ban Protested.”

¹⁹ Judy Hair interview, 2012. Gene McGinnis interview, 2006. Mike Poole interview, 2006.; Similarly, Judy Hair reports that in the mid-1970s she found a flyer advertising a showing of “Birth of a Nation” in the Junior High School Auditorium. She called the School Superintendent and she said, “He put a stop to that.”

²⁰ Linda Hawkins interview, 2012.

The actions of the crowd and Mr. Farrar in the football game incident and of the Summerville merchants responding to the KKK march are indicative of racial attitudes of many white people in Chattooga County. Compared with the attitudes prevalent throughout the counties in South Georgia where massive resistance to integration dominated the social and political scene throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Chattooga County residents as a whole, like people in much of Northwest Georgia, held moderate views on race and school desegregation. The attitude seemed to reflect, not a desire for racial equality or integration, but, rather, a desire to maintain calm.

Other indicators of the desire of county citizens to maintain peace between the races are evident in their voting records. In the 1946 gubernatorial race, Chattooga voted for James Carmichael, a business progressive and racial moderate, over the two segregationist candidates, Eugene Talmadge and E.D. Rivers.²¹ When Eugene Talmadge's son, Herman, ran for governor in 1950, although he did win Chattooga County, it was by less than 200 votes. As the debate over school desegregation erupted during the 1960s, however, county voters fell into line with the state as a whole by electing two staunch supporters of segregation, Ernest Vandiver and Marvin Griffin. By the 1966 election, Chattooga County voters returned to their more moderate political choices as they chose the racially moderate Ellis Arnall in the Democratic primary, though by the slimmest of margins, over the "race baiting" Lester Maddox. Although Maddox won the general election by a margin of more than 2 to 1, that was primarily due to his Democratic Party affiliation rather than his views on the issues of segregation or race.²²

²¹ "James V. Carmichael," *The New Georgia Encyclopedia* online, www.georgiaencyclopedia.org. This source describes Carmichael as having "a business progressive philosophy that championed moderation in race relations, improved public schools, better roads, and whatever it took to attract major companies to Georgia."

²² *The Summerville News*, various articles from 1946 to 1966.

In addition to choosing gubernatorial candidates with more moderate views toward segregation, the county's newspaper, *The Summerville News*, similar to most newspapers in the Southeast, came out in support of the open school plan. The paper's editorial of 1961, when the debate raged in Georgia over desegregation of both the University of Georgia and the Atlanta Public Schools came down squarely on the side of maintaining public education. In "An Open Letter" to the Georgia General Assembly and to Chattooga Representative James H. "Sloppy" Floyd, the *News* made the following argument:

You will either in the forthcoming session or in a special session later in the year, be faced with one of the most difficult decisions of your legislative career. You must decide whether our children will have public schools. It's true that the Supreme Court has handed the South a bitter pill to swallow. But need we cut out our tongues in order to avoid swallowing the pill? Isn't there some other solution? ... It is readily apparent that the school problems are different in the various areas of Georgia. Why should the state force its ideas on local communities? Isn't that on par with the federal government's interposing its ideas on the South? ... We aren't for taking the federal interference without a struggle, but we think the struggle could be ironed out in some more effective way than closing our public schools as present law requires.²³

The letter in *The News* was consistent with the sentiment expressed by the majority of the county's residents at the ballot box. The people of Chattooga County, or at least the economically more prominent members of the county, were more concerned about maintaining public education and making economic progress than they were about staunch support of school desegregation. They did not favor integration or school desegregation, but they believed that token desegregation was preferred to the closing of schools and risking the educational and economic progress of their community. The local paper again expressed its concern over Governor Vandiver and the General Assembly's proposal to end compulsory school laws if

²³ "An Open Letter," *The Summerville News*, January 5, 1961.

school desegregation took place. On the prospect of ending compulsory education, the editor of *The Summerville News* wrote the following.

If rumors emanating out of Atlanta are true, we may soon be without a compulsory school attendance law, period. And persons now sending their students to private schools may be able to get state funds for paying tuition. Chattooga County should be especially concerned with the compulsory school attendance law. Only a small percentage of our people have children in private schools, there are no private schools within our bounds and perhaps few would seek money for sending youngsters to out-of-county schools. But we do need compulsory school attendance. It's just an unfortunate fact that there are people who don't realize the value of an education, and without urging, would deprive their children of this opportunity.

Again, the editorial made clear that the paper, while preferring not to desegregate the schools, recognized the inevitability of school desegregation. The hopes expressed by the newspaper were for a solution designed to maintain as much segregation as possible without losing control over the local schools and over the education of the community's young people. As Jeff Roche concluded in his examination of the Sibley Commission hearings regarding the closure of schools in the face of forced school desegregation in 1961, a similar attitude was held by counties throughout the northern portion of Georgia. When given the choice either to close the schools or to adopt some alternative open school policy, the counties of northwest and northeast Georgia voted to maintain open schools and to adopt plans that allowed for limited, community-controlled desegregation.²⁴

The Wages of Whiteness in Chattooga County: A Physical, Social, and Economic Divide

In spite of these somewhat accommodating views of Chattooga County's white community toward the members of the African American community, no evidence suggests that

²⁴ Roche, Jeff. *Restructured Resistance*. The book also shows that Chattooga County was the only county in northwest Georgia not to send a delegate to the hearings in Cartersville. This may have been due in part to a huge snow storm that hit the area that day.

the white community in this southern mountain county was willing to forgo the wages of whiteness in exchange for social and economic equality between the races. In fact, the African American and white communities in the small Appalachian county, like those in most rural areas of the South, were divided physically, economically, and socially. Although many white residents in Chattooga County express the belief that school desegregation went smoothly in Chattooga County because they, or their children, had “always been around blacks,” most white residents knew very few African Americans. In addition, the relationships that did exist were never relationships between equals. In large part, the white and black residents of Chattooga County existed within two distinct spheres within the same geographic location.

When it was suggested that “everyone knew their place,” this referred not only to their place in society, but also to their physical, geographical place. Outside the city limits of Summerville, most African Americans in the county lived in the farming communities of either Gore or Holland. As Linda Hawkins says, they lived in the “country.” The majority of the county’s African American residents, however, lived within the city limits of Summerville in one of two neighborhoods—up the hill from the all-white First Methodist Church, or, more significantly, along Highland Avenue, where the A.C. Carter School was located, two blocks off the Main Street from downtown Summerville. Within some parts of the white community, this area was known as “Nigger Town,” and it was an area where most white people did not go. Larry Parker, who grew up on a farm just outside Summerville, said about the Highland area, “You didn’t go up there. That was a no-no. I don’t know why. You just didn’t. They’d never done anything to me, but you just didn’t go up there. My parents said, ‘Don’t go up there.’ I didn’t know why. You just didn’t go.”²⁵

²⁵ Larry Parker interview.

The son of a prominent lawyer in town, Arch Farrar grew up in the 1950s and early 1960s on a street populated primarily by the families of merchants, lawyers, and doctors in the county. He remembered that just two houses from his own was the part of town occupied primarily by black families. These black residents walked and rode up and down his street, but he never remembered playing with them or thinking of interacting with them beyond their role as domestic helpers in his home. Although Mr. Farrar frequently played with the children of the black woman who stayed with his siblings and him throughout his childhood, the boundaries of appropriate social interaction were quite clearly drawn.²⁶

For most white residents of Chattooga County, the African American community remained a racial “other.” The fear and distrust of African Americans was borne, not out of life experience, but out of lessons about color that were passed from one generation to the next. As the historian Gunnar Myrdal contended, this irrationally placed fear based solely on skin color meant that “no Negro can ever attain the status of even the lowest white.”²⁷ There was no rational basis for this color line; it simply was a part of the social fabric of most rural southern communities—whether in the southern-most agrarian areas of deep south Georgia, or the mountainous Appalachian areas of northwest Georgia.

In addition to the physical division of the black and white communities of Chattooga County, a social gap existed as well. In every respect, African Americans were treated as second-class citizens. When blacks and whites did relate to each other, it was always on a superior-

²⁶ Arch Farrar interview in Summerville, Georgia, July 20, 2012.

²⁷ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, Vol. II* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997) p. 597.

inferior basis, with whites, regardless of economic or social status, on the superior side. This notion was conveyed from the most basic services such as segregated waiting rooms at doctor's offices and hospitals to entertainment where African Americans were required to sit in the balcony of the theatre or to receive food through the back door of Alexander's Restaurant. Although black patrons could shop in downtown Summerville, they generally entered in the back and were helped by the store owner. One white resident remembered downtown Summerville as a place with clearly marked boundaries based on race. "Everybody just did their own thing. Like there used to be a Wash-a-teria and it had sign above the door, 'Whites Only;' and the Bus Depot, 'Whites Only;' and the theatre, 'Whites Only,' but the blacks did come and had to sit in the balcony. That's just the way it was."²⁸ Will Hair, whose father owned and operated the Summerville-Trion Hospital in downtown Summerville in the 1940s said that his father kept two rooms of the hospital just for black patients. Linda Farmer similarly recalled a situation in the 1950s when she had her appendix removed at the Trion Hospital where they had two rooms reserved just for African American patients.

No one growing up in Summerville, either white or black, seemed to have questioned the dual citizenship that existed in the community. It was "just the way things were."²⁹ This unspoken assumption was part of the wages of whiteness—the ability to move freely in your community while those of a different skin color could not. It was ingrained in the fabric of society and passed down from generation to generation in subtle, and less than subtle forms. Milford Morgan, who grew up in Summerville and graduated from Chattooga High School in

²⁸ Larry Parker interview.

²⁹ Milford Morgan interview; Larry Parker interview; Suzanne Lanier interview; Mike Poole interview; Linda Hawkins Farmer interview.

1971, characterized this unspoken racial divide in the following manner. “My parents always said [referring to black people], ‘They’re just like you.’ Still, it was understood, I didn’t feel that if I had a black girlfriend, or if I brought over a black friend, that that would go over very well.”³⁰

Herein lies the “caste etiquette” that Myrdal referred to when he claimed that whites wanted African Americans to be kept “in their place” which was defined as “under themselves.”³¹ Most white residents of Chattooga County believed there were no problems between the races because the balance of power remained stable, and that power belonged to the whites who maintained control of the economic, social, and political landscape of the county. When desegregation was imposed, it was accepted rather peacefully, not because of a sudden belief in racial equality, but because it was not seen as a threat to the “racial etiquette” that had always existed. As Michelle Brattain indicated in her examination of race and the development of working class culture in Rome, Georgia, the town just twenty-five miles south of Summerville, “The pervasiveness of race often allowed speakers, writers, workers, and candidates to take their audience’s understanding of whiteness for granted.”³²

The single most essential ingredient in the racial and social code that defined life in this southern Appalachian county was economic. In Chattooga County, as in textile areas throughout the southeast, this economic pressure occurred in the form of job restrictions. For African American families in the county, few mill jobs were available other than the lowest paid outside help. This meant that even the least educated and poorest whites held higher paying jobs than did

³⁰ Interview with Milford Morgan, 2012.

³¹ Myrdal, p. 597.

³² Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 7.

the African Americans in the community. In addition, if a black man or woman wanted to work, it often meant they worked as a laborer for a white family.³³ The only job available for college-educated African Americans was that of teaching and it was through this avenue that those individuals who did improve their economic situation worked their way up. Even in this highly respected occupation, however, African Americans received lower salaries than did their white counterparts. In addition, regardless of the educational level attained, African American teachers were still relegated to the role of every other African American in the community who could neither sit at the restaurant counter, sit inside to wait on the bus, nor watch a movie from the floor of the theatre.

One of the most interesting dynamics in this small community was the pervasive use of African American women as domestic help in the homes of white residents regardless of the economic status of the white family. Though the relationships forged were, at least from the perspective of the white residents who often were “raised” by these black women, based on affection, they were grounded in the unspoken, but accepted, power structure that controlled all life in Chattooga County that was somewhat paternalistic in nature. Almost every white resident of Chattooga County interviewed for this study grew up with black people in their houses in some capacity. Margaret Parker, whose father was a mill worker and whose mother worked as a receptionist for various doctors or dentists in Trion, as a child was cared for by a black woman and her husband. Her description of this couple is typical of that relayed by other white residents of the county.

³³ For more information on race and work in southern cotton mills see: Jacqueline Dowd Hall, *et al.*, *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*, (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 1987). Victoria Byerly, *Hard Times Cotton Mill Girls: Personal Histories of Woman hood and Poverty in the South*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

As a child I had a lady who stayed with me and kept me. I can't even remember her name, but Mr. Bill was her husband. ... She loved me and I loved her—she and Mr. Bill. Anytime somebody needed to be with me, she was there. Like when my grandmother died, she stayed with me. But I would want to go home with her so when Mama or Daddy came home from work or wherever they'd been, I would have a paper bag with my clothes in it and I would want to go home with Mr. Bill and her. They would take me home with them and Mother and Daddy would have to come get me in a little bit.³⁴

Many times the white people who lived near each other would “lend out” their domestic help to their neighbors. Even as a young child, Margaret took for granted the racial divide. She says she thought of her caretakers “almost as family.” And yet, when asked her if she knew anything about their children or other parts of their lives, she did not. Although the bond was strong between this little girl and her caretaker, it was not a relationship between equals.

Similarly, Milford Morgan recalls the maid, Alice Smith, who worked for his parents when he was young.

We had a maid, Alice Smith, and she would be there when I would come home from school. She'd clean the house and wash dishes. Most of my friends had that. And they were all black. Another black couple, Rosa and Bob, were supposedly the only ones I would stay with when I was a baby. When I was on up when they'd see me, they'd have to hug me and squeeze me. They were really great friends.³⁵

Other professional families in Summerville had the same arrangement with their domestic help. One retired teacher recalled that her “children grew up with the black ladies. It was common to have a black woman in your home.”³⁶ According to Mrs. Selman, sometimes the women accompanied the family on trips to watch the children while the adults were otherwise occupied.

³⁴ Margaret Parker interview.

³⁵ Milford Morgan interview, 2012; Arch Farrar relates a similar relationship with the black woman who stayed with his family saying that “she raised me.”

³⁶ Interview with Wylene Selman in Summerville, Georgia, February 11, 2012.

In addition to the domestic help provided by women, black men often worked odd jobs for some of the merchants in town. Milford Morgan remembered black men working for his grandfather at the coal and timber store doing menial chores like shoveling coal or stacking lumber. His grandfather also sold coal to black people “on the credit.” He remembered that for years older black men and women would see him and tell him how much they appreciated his grandfather for doing that. “We stayed warm,” Milford remembers them telling him, “because your grandfather would do that.”³⁷ As with the relationship between employer and maid, the relationship that developed between Mr. Morgan’s grandfather and these African American men and women was paternalistic in nature. The power and the money remained in the hands of the white business owner. The relationship was peaceful because everyone followed the time-honored racial protocol, and the wages of whiteness remained intact. Milford could never imagine one of these African American men gathering around the pot-bellied stove with his grandfather and the other power brokers of the Chattooga County community to engage in talk of business or politics. By barring, not through words or legislation, but through accepted social custom, African American men and women from these informal gatherings, where business and political relationships were forged, the color line remained intact.

Even among the more rural families outside Summerville, a power structure existed in which African American families were viewed as economically inferior, and, thereby, socially and intellectually inferior as well. Reminiscent of Elizabeth Hale’s findings in *The Making of Whiteness*, African Americans in Chattooga County had been denied access to the best jobs and the best education and then were branded as “lazy” or inferior for having to work in such menial positions. Mike Poole and Larry Parker both recalled black families who would work for their

³⁷ Milford Morgan interview.

fathers whenever the cotton needed harvesting. Larry Parker recalled that all his life the same two black families rented from his father and lived on his family's farm. His description of his relationship with black people prior to school desegregation is similar to many others.

Now I'm gonna talk to you like I did when I was growing up. There was blacks, we called 'em Niggers. That's always, when I was growing up, in my time, that's what they were. We were whites and they were Niggers. And there were blacks that lived on our place in a little house there and another little house there. They rented from Daddy. ... And that was really the only relations I had with 'em. There was a group that lived up the road and they would come down during cotton season and work for my dad some to make a little extra money like everyone else. I didn't really have that much of a relationship with any of 'em because there wasn't that many of 'em.³⁸

Similarly, Mike Poole's father often hired older black people to help him on the farm. His mother also hired a black woman, Mrs. Farmer, to help around the house. He remembered that often Mrs. Farmer was paid with "hand-me-down clothes."³⁹

The seemingly placid race relations that generally characterized the mountain region of Georgia in the 1960s, then, were founded on a system that accepted a two-tiered class system based on skin color. As long as the African American population continued to play by the rules established by the economic and political leaders of the white community, peaceful relations would remain. For many members of the African American community, acceptance of the status quo was the best insurance against physical and economic retribution. That is why Linda Farmer's parents seldom let her go to town. About going into Summerville with other high school students, they told her, "Don't do that. You know you're not wanted there. Don't go." She said that she never really had resentment about the segregation in town, but only resented that her mother would leave her to go take care of someone else's children. She remembered that

³⁸ Larry Parker interview.

³⁹ Mike Poole interview in Summerville, Georgia, June 29, 2006.

often her mother would board with one family and that family would send her to stay with another family's children. She could imagine the women her mother worked for saying, "Belle will do it; Belle will come over."⁴⁰ Never did these white families stop to think of the impact her overnight stays would have on her own children and her own family.

As Chattooga County inched ever closer to the reality of school desegregation, the relations between the black and white communities in the county appeared unchanged. While many white children grew up with feelings of deep affection for the black women who were raising them, and many others worked side-by-side on their parents' farms with black laborers, the economic and political power remained squarely in the hands of the white community. Outside their roles as servants or laborers for white employers, the African Americans had little contact with the whites of Chattooga County. When they did interact with one another, it was never as equals. Chattooga County's white community, though it did not share the rabid racism prevalent in the southern parts of Georgia, continued to perpetuate a social, economic, and political system in which power rested within the hands of a few wealthy whites who benefited from the racial divide maintained among the working class. The question that remained for the educational, business, and political leaders of the county was how best to maintain their traditional power structure in the face of a Supreme Court decision with which they clearly disagreed, but also were powerless to stop. This was the dilemma faced by School Superintendent James Spence, School Board Chair Billy Penn Selman, and the rest of the Chattooga County School Board as they met in the Chattooga Court House the night of April 10, 1966. The decision of the board to fully desegregate, as well as the implementation and the impact of this decision on this small southern county are further explored in the next chapter. In

⁴⁰ Linda Farmer Hawkins interview.

what ways would school desegregation influence the racial status quo that characterized the fabric of life in Chattooga County?

CHAPTER 6

THE DESEGREGATION OF SCHOOLS IN CHATTOOGA COUNTY

For the educational leaders of Chattooga County in the mid-1960s, school desegregation seemed inevitable. Although the all-white school board was convinced that parents from both the black and white communities preferred to maintain segregated schooling and the status quo, its members knew they risked U.S. federal government interference in their local schools if they refused to desegregate. This chapter outlines the steps taken by both the Chattooga County and the Trion City schools as they followed the letter of the law and implemented court ordered desegregation. In addition, the chapter examines the reactions and the attitudes of the county's white students, parents, and educators to the changes within the schools as desegregation became a reality. Finally, the chapter chronicles the steady movement of middle class white children out of the Chattooga County School System and into the Trion City Schools. The chapter examines the reasons for this transfer of students and its implications for the role of whiteness in the continuing struggle over school desegregation in the schools of Chattooga County.

The Desegregation Process

Realizing the inevitability of forced desegregation in their schools, and unwilling to risk the loss of \$85,000 in federal funding, the Chattooga County School Board, prior to its 1966 decision to fully integrate the schools, heeded the advice of the Federal Attorney General's Office and voted for partial desegregation for the 1965-1966 school year. After studying their options, the board implemented a school choice plan similar to that used in counties across the Appalachian area. The original board plan, which had called for gradual freedom of choice,

beginning with the first, second, eleventh, and twelfth grades and then adding four grades each year until full freedom of choice was reached by the 1967-1968 school year, had not been approved by the Department of Housing Education and Welfare. The new plan, then, called for implementation of freedom of choice for all grades in the coming year. The board resolution read as follows.

Effective with the commencement of the school year 1965-66, all students in the public schools of Chattooga County, Georgia, shall have freedom of choice, in the manner and through the medium herein-after stated, to attend any school in the Chattooga County School System, regardless of race, color or national origin and enjoy the benefit of all services and facilities available at said school.¹

Furthermore, the resolution stated that all buses would be fully desegregated and that all students living in Chattooga County who attended Trion City Schools, whether black or white, would have the choice of continuing in the Trion schools or of returning to the Chattooga County School System on a freedom of choice basis.

Immediately following the board meeting and its decision, a letter dated August 10, 1965, was mailed to the home of each school age child in Chattooga County. The letter contained the new freedom of choice policy as well as a form on which to choose the child's school for the 1965-1966 school year. According to a report from the U.S. Federal Office of Education, about thirty African American students out of the 500 enrolled in the system chose to leave their schools to enter the all-white elementary, middle, and high schools of Chattooga County.²

¹ "Resolution to the State of Georgia," in Chattooga County Board of Education School Board *Minutes* Book, August 10, 1965.

² "Planning Educational Change: How Five School Systems Desegregated," Office of Education, Department of Housing Education and Welfare, (Washington, D.C., 1969) ERIC Ed 030218.

Eugene McGinnis, whose father owned McGinnis Drug Store in Summerville and whose mother was a high school teacher at Chattooga, was in eighth grade in 1965. He recalled that on the first day of school that fall they had a school-wide assembly. “Of course we knew that some black students were coming, but none of us knew who it was going to be. And they marched ‘em in during the assembly, about four or five students.”³ Milford Morgan recalls that same day that they brought in the new black students and toured them through the school. “I never felt threatened by them,” he remembers. “They only brought in the best students.”⁴

At the high school, about four or five black students enrolled at Chattooga at each grade level. Larry Parker, who was a junior that fall, remembered that they brought all the new black students into the school at the same time and took them to their appropriate homeroom based on alphabetical order. He does not remember anyone reacting either violently or inappropriately. It was apparent that everyone in the schools, students and teachers alike, had accepted this token desegregation and wanted to proceed as if nothing had changed. The people of Chattooga County wanted this transition to happen peacefully. Larry Parker’s words about his new classmates seem to capture best the attitude of the school and community at the time.

They were just kids like us, you know. They didn’t really want to do it. And we didn’t know if we wanted ‘em to. But they came in the room, and they put everybody in the room in alphabetical order, A to Z, and if they happened to be right by you, you just got in there right with ‘em.⁵

³ Eugene McGinnis interview in Summerville, Georgia, July 24, 2006. Linda Hawkins, a student at the all-black A.C. Carter School in the year of school choice also stated that a group of parents and teachers contacted some of the better students to go to the all-white high school. Although she decided not to go, a few others in her class did leave.

⁴ Milford Morgan interview, 2012.; Hixie Brewer and Wylene Selman, both teachers at Chattooga High School in 1965 also believed only the best students from A.C. Carter were brought into the schools. Linda Farmer Hawkins, a senior at A.C. Carter in 1965, decided to stay at her school, but says they asked her to go along with some of the other better students.

⁵ Larry Parker interview.

Desegregation of Trion City Schools

While the Chattooga board was wrestling with the issue of desegregation, the Trion City Schools were designing their own desegregation plans. Like Chattooga, Trion schools had devised a two year plan of total school desegregation. Their plan stated that “all eligible students, regardless of race,” would attend the formerly all-white Trion High School during the 1965-1966 school year. At the end of the 1965-1966 school year, the formerly all-black Westside School would close and all elementary students from Westside would attend the formerly all-white Trion Elementary School. The closure of Westside would bring approximately 55 black students into the Trion Elementary and High School. In response to this action, a large number of black parents attended the school board meeting on July 20, 1965, to discuss concerns for the new school year. The attendance was so large that the meeting was moved to the elementary school library where the group scheduled a meeting with the high school principal to review the high school course of study. In addition, a date was set for black parents and students to take a tour of the school prior to the first day of classes.⁶

Most former Trion students remembered very little about the integration of their schools. Susan McGinnis remarked that “there was only one black girl in my grade so it wasn’t really that big of a deal, and she was accepted very well.”⁷ Mike Poole remembered integration taking place during his sophomore year when six of the African American students tried out for the football team. “Six came out for the first practice,” he recalls, “but only two showed up the next day; they stayed. The two that stayed were good football players.” He recalled no trouble among the

⁶ Trion School Board “Minutes,” July 20, 1965.

⁷ Susan McGinnis interview, July 24, 2006.

players, and he said that one of the black players picked him up for school. “I thought he was kind of something because he had a bottle of Thunderbird wine in his glove box.”⁸ Despite the seemingly uneventful desegregation of schools in Trion, there was, among white parents and school administrators, an overriding, though not publicly articulated fear—the fear of interracial dating. To address this concern, soon after establishing its desegregation plan, the Trion City School Board created the following school policy for extracurricular activities.

1. That there be no more dances, parties, or pep meetings after school hours.
2. That any students transported by bus for athletic or band events; the boys and girls will not sit together.⁹

With a larger population of African American students in the Chattooga schools, the shift to total school desegregation was more complicated than it was for Trion schools. The task for Chattooga’s school board was to speedily desegregate seven schools, about 85% white and 15% black, along with a faculty of 128 white teachers and 16 African American teachers. At the time of desegregation, there were two all-black schools, A.C. Carter in Summerville serving grades one through twelve, and Holland School in the rural southwest side of the county serving grades one through eight. These two schools, twelve miles apart, shared one principal.¹⁰

Desegregation of Chattooga County Schools

At the request of Superintendent Spence, and Board Chair Selman, a survey team from the Georgia Department of Education was called to make recommendations on how to proceed most efficiently with desegregation in the county. The survey team recommended closing the two black schools in the 1966-67 school year and adopting a desegregation plan based on

⁸ Mike Poole interview.

⁹ Trion City School Board “Minutes,” August 19, 1965.

¹⁰ “Planning Educational Change: How Five School Systems Desegregated,” p. 1.

geographic zones. Under this plan, all county high school students would attend Chattooga County High School in Summerville while the elementary schools in Lyerly, Menlo, and Pennville would serve all white and black students who lived in their respective city limits. In addition, the former A.C. Carter School would house all other fifth and sixth grade students in the county, while the first through fourth grades would remain at Summerville Elementary School, and the seventh and eighth grades would remain in the old Summerville Junior High. Following official notification of these recommendations, representatives of the Chattooga County School Board attended a conference in Atlanta in March of 1966 to discuss their situation with consultants from HEW. As a result of this meeting, a consultant from Boston was sent to Chattooga County to conduct a series of public meetings in each of the small towns in the county. Both Superintendent Spence and Board Chair Selman saw these town-hall-style meetings as an essential component in the successful implementation of the desegregation plan.¹¹

By all accounts, the desegregation of schools in the 1966-67 school year went smoothly. Superintendent Spence, in his interview with the U.S. Office of Education within the Department of Health Education and Welfare, said “there was a lot of howling and gnashing of teeth for several days,”¹² but overall it was accepted without incident. One of the greatest factors in the smooth transition, according to Spence, was the backing of both the county ministerial association and the local civic groups. He went to all these groups and presented desegregation

¹¹ “Planning Educational Change: How Five School Systems Desegregated”; Selman interview; Interview with James Spence in Dalton, Georgia, July 17, 2006.

¹² “Planning Education Change,” p. 5.

as an issue of “fairness and obedience to law,” and not one of racial equality. This message won over the confidence of many white parents.¹³

In addition to active solicitation of support from community leaders, other forces were behind Chattooga County’s smooth transition to desegregated schools. One essential element to this transition was that the children of both the school superintendent and school board chair Selman were enrolled in the newly desegregated A.C. Carter School building which became the home for all fifth and sixth grade students in the Summerville district. This move into the former all-black school was one of the most controversial decisions made by the board. The controversy is one of the best indicators of white parents’ honest feelings about African Americans as somehow a racial “other.” Though these complaints were voiced privately to the school superintendent and to county administrators, several parents worried about their children using the same furniture as the black children had used at A.C. Carter. Although the county could not afford to replace all the school furniture, it did install all new bathroom facilities in the building as a way to calm the fears of hesitant white parents who believed that black children were inherently contaminated.¹⁴

After much debate and hesitation, school desegregation soon became a way of life for this small southern Appalachian community. Overall, the transition proceeded rather uneventfully for the students, teachers, and administrators who now spent most of their day in an environment different from what they had known all their lives. For most whites in the community, school desegregation did little to change the established social, economic, or political patterns of life. Little changed in the segregated, two-tiered society in which they lived

¹³ “Planning Educational Change”; James Spence interview.

¹⁴ James Spence interview; Mike Poole interview.

because the schools were the only part of this community that had desegregated. *The Summerville News* expressed the sentiment of most of the business and professional people of the white community in its editorial encouraging a peaceful transition to school desegregation.

Why integrate now, while other areas of the South are still fighting for segregated schools? The answer to this question is also commendable to the people of our county. This is Chattooga County, not Selma, Alabama, or Philadelphia, Mississippi. Racial violence has not found a home here. While we may not agree with the policy of integration, we have come to realize that no amount of violence is going to bring back segregation.... The time has come that we must learn to live without hate if we are to live together peacefully. The schools are designed for learning, and possibly, through integration of our schools, we will learn that hate has no place in a civilized society.¹⁵

Like most white residents across North Georgia, the majority of people in Chattooga County still supported segregation—it was part of what they considered their “heritage”—but they preferred limited desegregation to the violence they read about in the newspapers and witnessed on television in cities and towns across the Southeast. Even Board Chairman Bill Selman, who pushed his board to approve full scale desegregation, referred to this ambivalence toward desegregation when he said, “I had friends on both sides[of the issue] because I was on both sides.” What was apparent to Selman was that compliance allowed the school system greater self-determination and made it better able to maintain the status quo. Discussing the idea of total school desegregation, Selman said he preferred total integration to partial “because then we could tell the government to go its own way, and we could keep our school system the way we wanted to.”¹⁶ In this way, then, desegregation was viewed, not as something that would transform life in Chattooga County, but as a way of “perpetuating” life as it always had been.

¹⁵ “Full-Scale Integration to Come in Fall,” *The Summerville News*, June, 1966, p. 2-A.

¹⁶ William Penn Selman interview.

Desegregation of the schools seemed to pose no threat to the extant white power structure and the accepted racial etiquette.

This same attitude spurred Gov. Vandiver in 1961 to renege on his pledge to close Georgia's public schools if forced integration occurred, and it led the Sibley Commission to recommend local control over desegregation and an end to massive resistance. In areas such as northwest Georgia, where the black population was less than 15%, compliance with the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling on the local school board's own terms offered the white members of the community the greatest protection from uninvited, real change to their established social norms.¹⁷

Implementing School Desegregation

The white students and teachers at Chattooga County and Trion City Schools found their lives little affected by desegregation because, as many former students and teachers noted, so few black students entered the schools. Most of the teachers remembered no trouble between their black and white students. Although the Chattooga High School students remembered that it took awhile for the sports teams to fully integrate, a small number of black students did play football during those early years of desegregation. Milford Morgan explained that this lack of participation was due in part to the fact that "blacks hadn't played organized sports; especially football and baseball." For that reason, they were unable to compete with the white players who had been given the opportunity to develop their skills in Recreation League ball. Although no evidence suggests that the black students who played ball were rejected in any way, in the locker rooms, as would become the trend throughout the school, the black players generally congregated together and the white players also stayed together. Milford Morgan, who played

¹⁷ Roche, *Restructured Resistance*.

football throughout his four years in high school, viewed the segregation of the locker rooms as a normal part of high school life. He explained the situation this way. “You sat with your friends; you dressed with your friends in the locker room.”¹⁸

Interestingly, unlike other schools throughout the Southeast that desegregated, Chattooga never was forced to hold separate proms or to have certain numbers of cheerleading or homecoming court positions reserved for white or black students. Bill Kinzy explained that when he came to Chattooga High School as assistant principal in 1967 the cheerleaders were elected, and the first year he was there one of the black girls, Trudy Ludy, was elected to the cheerleading squad by both white and black students. After that, he saw no need to set up racial quotas for cheerleading or homecoming because the students had taken care of that for him. In general, the white students of Chattooga accepted the black students who arrived at their school, but they did not necessarily integrate them fully into school life. Most former students agreed with Larry Parker who credited both the prevailing moral code and the demeanor of the black students themselves with the ease with which these new students were accepted into the high school. “You were taught to be kind to people, and there just wasn’t any bullying.” In addition, Larry made the following observation about the black students who chose to attend Chattooga High. “They came to school with their best clothes; they made a real good impression.”¹⁹ Similarly, Milford Morgan found that “the ones that wanted to be accepted were accepted.”²⁰ In other words, acceptance was based on those black students who entered the school not “rocking the boat,” but living by the long-established racial code and power structure.

¹⁸ Milford Morgan interview, 2012.

¹⁹ Margaret Parker interview; Larry Parker interview.

²⁰ Milford Morgan interview.

The interaction among teachers was similar to that observed among students in the Chattooga County Schools. For school board members and administrators alike, one of the primary concerns about desegregation was teacher placement. To calm the fears of parents during the first year of desegregation, the school board decided that elementary students would spend half the day with a black teacher and half the day with a white teacher. By the end of the year, however, the board had received no real complaints and so the policy was dropped. Superintendent Spence saw the initial policy as a positive move for the school system, however, because it paved the way for team teaching and other innovations that soon were implemented into the elementary school program.²¹

Parents and students involved in the first few years of desegregation had only positive memories of the black teachers they, or their children, had in the schools. Even so, for administrators and some teachers as well, one of the primary difficulties with school desegregation lay, not with integration of black students into white schools, but the integration of teachers. Wylene Selman, a business education teacher at Chattooga High School, believed that “some of the black teachers were not qualified to teach” and the administration had to find a “place for them.”²² Former Chattooga High School principal, Bill Kinzy, explained his dilemma as a school principal. “We kept all the black teachers from A.C. Carter and they couldn’t teach. I went to Mr. Spence and I said I don’t know where to put ‘em, but they can’t teach. In those days, there was no certification and you could be teaching anything.”²³ Mr. Kinzy and Mr. Spence addressed this issue at the high school by assigning the teachers in whom they lacked confidence

²¹ “Planning Education Change”; James Spence interview.

²² Wylene Selman interview, February 11, 2012.

²³ Bill Kinzy interview, June 26, 2006.

a subject to teach “where they could do the least amount of damage.” In addition, the teaching assignments remained to some degree segregated as those students in upper level classes never recall having had a black teacher in their academic subjects.

The other problem Kinzy reported encountering was that many of the students who came to Chattooga High School from A.C. Carter were unprepared for the regular high school curriculum. Because their school had been underfunded and staffed with some unqualified and underpaid teachers, the students came to high school lacking the background knowledge necessary to succeed. He received a number of visits from the parents of black students complaining that their child had been an A or a B student at A.C. Carter and was making C’s and D’s at Chattooga. The parents were afraid that their children were being treated unfairly because of their race. Mr. Kinzy went to Julian Thomas, the former A.C. Carter principal, for advice. The principal explains that he came away with new insight into the situation.

Mr. Thomas told me there was a difference in their high school [A.C. Carter] and ours, and he said you don’t know it, but when the books got worn out over here, we’d get ‘em. And he said there’s a difference in the pay scale for our teachers. We weren’t paid like y’all were.²⁴

To deal with this problem, the school administration decided that they would reward many of their black students for effort and attitude. Mr. Kinzy made the following unwritten policy for high school graduation. “We had those kids and they were behind and we were trying to compensate. ... If that kid came to school and he gave his best effort, then we’re gonna graduate him. And I didn’t have a bit of problem with that...under the circumstances.”²⁵

²⁴ Bill Kinzy interview, 2012.

²⁵ Bill Kinzy interview, 2012.

Kinzy was certain of his policy at the time, but wondered later if he might have “over compensated” and accepted that this was the best these students could do. Even after integration, then, white students continued to dominate the upper level classes and to receive instruction from the best teachers. The fact that their children spent the majority of their school days in segregated classrooms may have been a relief to many white parents whose greatest academic fear about desegregation was that it would lead to a “watered-down curriculum.”²⁶ As such, the white students continued to be named Star Student, to get the best scholarships, to attend the better colleges, and eventually to hold the higher paying jobs. The power structure of whiteness, as Deever claimed in his study of desegregation in Bulloch County, a community in South Georgia, remained constant, its expression was changed.²⁷ White racial privilege, while altered somewhat in its articulation, remained firmly intact in the schools of Chattooga County.

Overall, then, the desegregation of schools in Chattooga County was peaceful. Members of the white community accepted the change as did the members of the black community. Indeed, it was from the black community that the school board, as well as the school administration, received the greatest number of complaints. Both the school superintendent and the chair of the school board received calls from individuals in the black community before the 1966 school year worried that their children would not do well in the formerly all-white Chattooga County High School. Others worried that the discipline would not be meted out fairly. This was particularly true at the high school where Bill Kinzy received numerous complaints

²⁶ Hixie Brewer interview, 2012.; Wylene Selman interview, 2012.; Bill Kinzy interview 2012 and 2006.; William P. Selman interview, 2012.

²⁷ Bryan Deever, “Desegregation in a Southern School System, 1968-1974: Power Resistance and the Discourse of Exclusion,” *Journal of Education* 174, p. 66-88.; Bryan Deever, “Living Plessy in the Context of *Brown*,” *Urban Review* 26: 4, December 1994, pp. 273-288.

from black parents when he administered different punishments for the black and white students involved in an altercation. Kinzy said he believed punishment should be based, not only on a particular act, but on the number and the severity of past offenses as well. Many of his parents disagreed with him and accused him of discrimination. In part, he believed, this was because of the climate of the time. “Everybody was so conscious of fairness, and everything being fair—both white and black parents. They would look for anything that seemed like preferential treatment for one over another.”²⁸ Neither the teachers interviewed nor the white students interviewed, however, recalled any real differences in the classroom between either the behavior or the work ethic of black and white students.²⁹

Despite complaints received initially from both black and white parents, however, the people of Chattooga County showed their support for the move toward desegregation in 1968 by re-electing Jim Spence as School Superintendent over a former Chattooga High School principal who ran, not only against Mr. Spence, but against desegregation.³⁰ The HEW workers who came into the county to interview parents and students involved in desegregation reported that most members of the black community seemed satisfied with the education their children were receiving. One parent interviewed by Federal Government consultants commented that “even though her child was now making lower grades, he was learning more.”³¹ Teachers reported having few problems in the classroom between black and white students. Hixie Brewer, who taught business education at the high school, was particularly pleased with the relationships she

²⁸ Bill Kinzy interview, 2012.

²⁹ Brewer interview.; Wylene Selman interview.; Milford Morgan interview.; Larry Parker interview.; Suzanne Lanier interview.

³⁰ “Planning Educational Change,”; *The Summerville News*., various issues throughout 1968.

³¹ “Planning Educational Change,” p. 7.

forged with some of her black students. Like most teachers interviewed, Mrs. Brewer saw “no real difference between black and white kids.” She especially recalls a conversation with one of the black girls in her senior typing class. Toward the end of the school year one of her black students remained after class to let Ms Brewer know how much her open acceptance meant to many of her African American students. She remembers the girl telling her the following. “I want to tell you that we appreciate you because you listen to us. We don’t have a black lady teacher that we can talk to, and we appreciate that.”³² For Ms Brewer, who grew up in Sand Mountain, Alabama, where, according to her own admission and that of a number of other sources, “blacks were not allowed,”³³ the relationships she forged with black students was evidence that desegregation was successful. Stories such as these, and many others indicate the social successes of desegregation. The question unanswered in these stories, however, is whether or not desegregation created any change in the powers of white privilege so integral to southern society as it had always existed.

Problems with Desegregation

The seemingly peaceful acceptance of school desegregation, however, is an indication neither of an absence of resistance from the white community nor of a successful school integration. What Superintendent Spence referred to in the HEW article as “howling and gnashing of teeth” took on several forms. His wife remembered a call from an unnamed individual threatening to kill her husband if he went through with the desegregation plan. Mr. Spence, who would not reveal the man’s identity, said that he was from out of town. On another occasion, the superintendent was in his office at the county court house when an angry white

³² Interview with Hixie Brewer in Lyerly, Georgia, February 13, 2012.

³³ Hixie Brewer.; Interview with Larry Parker.; Interview with James Spence.; Interview with Mike Poole.

parent stormed into his office to “set him straight.” Mr. Spence remembered that he was uncertain of the man’s intentions.

I remember one particular individual and he lived on Holland Road and he was very much opposed to it [school desegregation]. And he came to my office and I thought I was going to have to jump out the window on[to] the coal pile outside, but I was not going to back down from my plan. And he moved to Sand Mountain.³⁴

The only other negative response he remembered was one directed at his children. This was when his third grade son came home to tell his mother that some white boys had pushed him in a ditch. Ms. Spence was uncertain of how to respond, but she remembered that her son told her “it was all okay because this black boy helped me out.”³⁵

The reaction of Chattooga County’s white community to school desegregation, and the lack of resistance that it invoked, is similar to what Robert Menefee found in his extensive study in 1954 of the whites in fifty-one communities across the Appalachian highlands of North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. What he discovered was general indifference toward desegregation because the people believed it would happen regardless of public opinion. Generally, they were willing to allow gradual desegregation because it could happen without any “dire” consequences.³⁶ Similar to Chattooga County, however, this indifference among whites toward school desegregation did not indicate an acceptance of either social integration or of a transformation in the power structure. Returning to one Appalachian county in West Virginia more than thirty years following its peaceful desegregation process, Alice Carter found that the schools remained largely segregated. In part, this was due to the long-standing distance between

³⁴ Interview with James Spence.

³⁵ Interview with James Spence.

³⁶ Robert G. Menefee, “The Supreme Court Decision and the Appalachian South,” *New South* 9: 10, October 1954, p. 1-11.

the races—they always had lived segregated lives—as well as “a tradition of white leaders ignoring black issues.” As long as the traditional power structure remained in place, there was little resistance to school desegregation. Once that traditional power structure and those dual racial roles were threatened, resistance to integration would emerge.³⁷

Similar forces were at work in Chattooga County. Although the schools desegregated, they failed to integrate. As principal, Bill Kinzy thought that was his most difficult job. “Taking in two groups of students and trying to bring them together.”³⁸ Although there were black and white students in most clubs, and black students on the student council and on most sports teams, there was no feeling that the two groups of students had become one unified body. Mr. Kinzy, along with all the former students interviewed, remarked that the separation of races was most evident in the lunchroom. “You’d go in the dining hall and the black kids were over here and the white kids were here; they segregated themselves.”³⁹ Even as the number of black students playing sports began to grow, basketball remained the main sport for black athletes, while the football and baseball teams were comprised primarily of white students. Although the white parents continued to attend basketball games, it was growing into the sport for black students. Milford Morgan remembered that even the cheerleaders remained somewhat segregated because those black cheerleaders, like Trudy Ludy, who were elected were chosen for the basketball cheer squad.⁴⁰

³⁷ Alice Carter, “Segregation and Integration in the Appalachian Coalfields: McDowell County Responds to the Brown Decision,” *West Virginia History* 54, pp. 78-104.

³⁸ Bill Kinzy interview, 2012.

³⁹ Bill Kinzy interview, 2006.; Similar comments were made by Suzanne Lanier, who graduated from high school in 1973, and was in 5th grade when desegregation first occurred.

⁴⁰ Milford Morgan interview. Various Chattooga County High School yearbooks verify these memories of racially divided sports teams and their cheerleading assignments.

The *de facto* segregation that remained within this legally desegregated school system in many ways sowed the seeds for later discontent and the emergence of the Trion City Schools as a segregated alternative for Chattooga County's schoolchildren. One of the primary problems Mr. Kinzy reported was the inability to win over many of the newly integrated black students to, what he believed, was a stricter code of discipline in the white schools. He recalls two rules in particular that were difficult to enforce: No touching, and no tardies to class.

I think most parents didn't want their white kid dating a black. They didn't want their white kids being too close socially [with black students]. The Kinzy Rule was no touching. Now, that was just my rule and that would've been my rule if I was in an all white school. It didn't matter the race. Now the black kids they didn't see a thing wrong with touching. You'd see a black boy have a girl backed in a corner whispering in her ear. And the black kids didn't see anything wrong with that. And we had to monitor things real closely and that was one rule we had to enforce real closely. But not because it's black and white.⁴¹

Kinzy admitted that growing up and attending college in a totally segregated world left him unprepared to work with African American schoolchildren. In addition, he and other white educators looked at the students from A.C. Carter as culturally "distinct" and less disciplined. Not only did the students voluntarily segregate themselves in the cafeteria, but also Mr. Kinzy believed that the black students were "two times as loud as all the other students put together."⁴²

Overall, the leaders of the county schools viewed the black students in the county as inferior both academically and culturally. W.P. Selman's view on desegregation largely mirrors that held by many in the county. He believed that desegregation was necessary, but he thought of it as something the black community and black students should have to "earn." Speaking of the segregated all-black school, he made the following assessment. "But I didn't feel like it needed

⁴¹ Kinzy interview, 2006.

⁴² Kinzy interview, 2012.

to be done away with—the black school. I’m a Southerner. I thought it [school integration] was a good idea, but I thought the blacks should earn it. It shouldn’t be given to them. I thought we should weed out the ones who were gonna be dragging the thing down.”⁴³ The paternalistic attitude of School Board Chairman Selman is reminiscent of much that Du Bois writes on the wages of whiteness. Quality education, for this white southerner, was the privilege of white society and white children. It was something, in the county school board chairman’s mind, that must be earned by those he viewed as a somewhat inferior race of people. His reasoning confirms W.J. Cash’s assessment of southern public schools as “a potent guarantee that white men shall not sink into equality with the black”⁴⁴ The goal of this “southerner,” who equated being southern with being white and southern was *de jure* desegregation that ensured continuation of both white control over education of black and white children and superior quality education for southern whites. Total school integration, then, in Selman’s mind, meant risking the equality of white and black young people which, in turn meant risking the degradation of white young people.

In a sense, the ease with which desegregation was accepted in Chattooga County was indicative of how little change it brought about. The decision-making power about school desegregation rested with the white political and economic leaders of the county. Bill Kinzy, after years of reflection, and feeling that he had never succeeded at school integration, probably sums up best the reasons for the failure of school integration, not only in Chattooga County, but in the nation as a whole. Speaking of the black students from A.C. Carter who came to Chattooga High School, he made the following assessment.

⁴³ W.P. Selman interview, 2012.

⁴⁴ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1941)p. 79-80.

They had lost their school; they had lost their identity. I don't know what their colors were at the black school, or their mascot, but I do know they came down there [Chattooga County High School] under our rules and traditions. It wasn't like we merged two schools. They came down there. We closed that one school and put 'em in ours.⁴⁵

All the change, then, was on the shoulders of the black students. The white community greeted school desegregation with indifference primarily because the power structure, the traditions, the way of life remained largely intact for white students, teachers, and parents. As long as there was no challenge to the established norms, to the established power structure, there was no resistance from the bulk of the white community. As Board Chair Selman established from the start, the movement toward desegregation was not made to transform education or society, but to please the government so that those who had always made decisions for the county, could, as he told the other members of the school board, “keep our school system the way we wanted it.”⁴⁶

The Dismantling of Desegregation and the Emergence of Trion as the School of Choice

For more than a decade, *de facto* segregation within the schools of Chattooga County remained firmly in place. Throughout the late 1960s and 1970s, the two school systems in Chattooga County—both Trion City Schools and Chattooga County Schools—saw little change in the demographic makeup of their student bodies. Some of the wealthiest families in the community moved their children to private schools in Rome or in Chattanooga, but for the most part the children of the county's most prominent white citizens—the doctors, lawyer, merchants, and large property owners—remained in the county school system. As always, about half of Trion's student body was composed of students who actually lived in the county, outside the Trion City Limits.

⁴⁵ Bill Kinzy interview, 2012.

⁴⁶ William Selman interview.

In spite of this seeming stability, two things were transpiring that would change the landscape of schooling in Chattooga County for many years to come. One of the first changes to take place in the early 1970s was a modification in Georgia law on the enrollment of students in school districts outside their own. Georgia state law had always required students to obtain written permission from their home school systems before they could enroll in a neighboring system. In May of 1972, however, the Georgia General Assembly passed legislation creating new guidelines on transferring students. According to the interpretation of the lawyer for the Trion City Schools, as of the 1972-73 school year, transferring students no longer needed the approval of their home school system to attend out-of-district schools. In addition, the law allowed school systems to charge tuition to transferring students “not to exceed the per pupil amounts of local tax funds.”⁴⁷ Following the exhaustive attempts described in chapter 3 between the Trion City and Chattooga County Schools to reach a compromise on merging the two systems, Trion now was equipped with legislative backing to maintain its school system by appealing to growing numbers of families in Chattooga County who lived outside the Trion City limits.

After leaving Chattooga High School in 1972, and spending two years at Gordon Lee High School, part of the Chickamauga City School System within neighboring Walker County, Bill Kinzy accepted the job as Superintendent of the Trion City Schools in 1974. On his appointment as superintendent, the board told him his main mission was to “keep the school system going.” Kinzy believed that the best way to succeed at this mission was to improve the quality of education and to improve student test scores. Like most of the Chattooga County residents interviewed, Kinzy believed that, when he first went to work there, the quality of

⁴⁷ Trion City School Board “Minutes,” May 2, 1972.

education offered at Trion was inferior to that at Chattooga. Although he characterized Chattooga's student body as one of the weakest in the state, saying, "We had one of the highest dropout rates in the state. We didn't test back then, but if we had, we would've had the lowest test scores in the state,"⁴⁸ he found Trion's program, particularly for its average and above average students, weaker than the one he had left at Chattooga. When he went to work at Trion, there were around 1,300 students enrolled, and, according to Kinzy and the Trion City School Board Minutes, about 700 of these students were county residents living outside the Trion school district lines. Prior to passage of the 1972 legislation, students were taken on a "first come, first served basis." With passage of the new law allowing any student into the school who desired, and the ability to charge tuition, Kinzy and the Trion City School Board believed they could increase both the quality of their schools as well as their student enrollment through two steps. First, any students from outside the district must complete an application to be accepted to Trion City Schools, and second, the schools would charge an annual tuition of \$25 per pupil for these out of district students. Mr. Kinzy told the board that the application process could ensure that only the best quality students with the best quality parents would attend Trion City Schools. Speaking about students applying to the Trion City School System, Kinzy gave his principals the following instructions. "And every year he's [the student's] got to fill this out and you [the principal] gotta sign it to take him. If he's here this year and you got nothing out of him and no cooperation out of his parents, then, by George, I expect you not to sign it and accept him back."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Kinzy interview, 2006.

⁴⁹ Kinzy interview, 2006. This information is verified by the Trion City School Board *Minutes* throughout a period from 1973 through 1975.

As such, the Trion City School Board established a policy by which it could choose the kind of student who was accepted in its schools. Although race never was an overt criterion in the application process, the indication was that, unless the student was a Trion resident, the school would accept only the students who were academically strong, who came from supportive families, and who were able to provide their own transportation to school. Perhaps the message was subtle because the characteristics the all-white board and the all-white administration desired were those acceptable to white southerners. Regardless of the intent, the schools remained less than 1% African American throughout the 1980s and into the second decade of the twenty-first century.⁵⁰ In response to critics who accused Kinzy and the school principals of racial discrimination, Mr. Kinzy replied, “We never turned away black kids during my tenure, but we have the image that you don’t come to Trion if you don’t want to work.”⁵¹ When he asked his principals when they had last turned down a black student who had applied to their schools, none of them said they had done so. Mr. Kinzy called back his accuser and told him, “You let me know of a black kid that wants to come to this school, and I’ll make sure he gets in.” None applied.

As Chattooga County moved into its second decade of school desegregation, the mood in the white community toward desegregation began to change. Many white residents were growing dissatisfied with the county schools. In talking to residents with children in the schools in the early to mid-1980s, I heard two main concerns emerge as factors in the steady migration of white students out of Chattooga County Schools and into Trion City Schools—school safety or student

⁵⁰ According to the 2010 Census, the city’s African American population comprises just over 2%. The significance is that no African Americans outside the city of Trion transferred into the schools.

⁵¹ Kinzy interview, 2012 and 2006.

discipline and fear over interracial dating. Although race was never openly discussed as a reason for dissatisfaction with the Chattooga schools, much of the rhetoric people used to express their dissatisfaction is reminiscent of the language used by white politicians to play on racial fears of the white community. In his study of race and politics in national campaigns from George Wallace to George H.W. Bush, the political historian Dan Carter found the use of rhetoric on law and order and public safety to be a key factor used by conservative Republican politicians from the 1960s through the 1990s to play on the “old racial phobias of white Southern Democrats [that] had been used to maintain a solid Democratic South.”⁵² Conservative candidates, through this rhetoric, were able to conjure up racist feelings among white southerners, as well as working class whites across the nation, without the use of overt racist language so that, as Carter quotes former Nixon aide John Ehrlichman saying, a voter could ‘avoid admitting to himself that he was attracted by a racist appeal.’⁵³

Similarly, in Chattooga County, those who chose to withdraw their children from county schools to place them in Trion City Schools often spoke of safety issues as one of their primary concerns. According to Kinzy, “A lot of parents told me that’s the reason why they wanted their kids at Trion; ... We can not afford to feel that our child is not safe. They felt safer at Trion than at Chattooga; we didn’t have any blacks at Trion.”⁵⁴ One Chattooga graduate who also worked in the Chattooga County School System in the 1980s and 1990s, but chose to send her children to Trion, said she believed a “rougher crowd was having more children, and she wanted

⁵² Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), p. 30.

⁵³ John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) p. 223, In Dan T. Carter, *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press 1996) p. 30.

⁵⁴ Kinzy interview, 2012.

her children to go to school with children from similar home backgrounds.”⁵⁵ She admitted that Chattooga seemed to have some better programs at the time, such as multi-age classes, but ultimately her desire for her children to go to school with “a better crowd” won out. A prominent lawyer in Summerville, who also was a graduate of Chattooga County High School who chose to send his own children to Trion, said that the Trion City School System just seemed to have better academic programs at the time; the students were more motivated. However, he was unable to specify what those better programs were. He said he just had a feeling that his children would receive a better education from Trion.⁵⁶

Lack of discipline was one of the most overwhelming factors people associated with the decision to move county school children to Trion. The Parkers withdrew their oldest daughter from Chattooga County schools in 1984, after her sixth grade year, because of fears regarding discipline. Two teachers at the high school had told Margaret and Larry that there were discipline problems mainly with the black males. Margaret said she heard from these teachers that “black boys were popping the squares in the ceilings and when the teacher took them to the office the principal sent the students back to class, and told the teacher not to bring those boys up there again.” After hearing this story, along with many others, the Parkers withdrew their daughter believing discipline at the high school was “out of control.”⁵⁷

For some Chattooga County white parents, desegregation became an issue in the 1980s because of increased competition from African American students for positions on sports teams. Some members of the white community believe that the real incentive for moving to Trion was

⁵⁵ Suzanne Lanier interview, 2006.

⁵⁶ Interview with Arch Farrar, 2012.

⁵⁷ Margaret Parker interview, 2012.; Larry Parker interview, 2012.

athletic. Milford Morgan knew of a number of people he had gone to high school with who had enrolled their children at Trion because of the increased opportunities to participate in athletics. He explained the situation in the following manner. “If I have a kid who’s gonna be an okay basketball player, I’d look and see, well, he can’t play at Chattooga, but if he goes to Trion, he can play.”⁵⁸ Some of the teachers at Chattooga High School in the 1980s saw a similar trend among the student body. Regarding those students who left Chattooga High School for Trion in the 1980s, one teacher recalled, “Most who went were football players who weren’t getting to play at Chattooga.”⁵⁹ Whether in athletics or in social interactions, as desegregation began to encroach on white privilege and white dominance in all aspects of school life, parents began to seek alternatives for their children, to find ways to return to the cultural norms of their own childhoods when racial norms were in place and white children benefited from the wages of whiteness.

Other parents, particularly those of middle-class and upper-middle-class socioeconomic standing, came under increasing pressure to leave Chattooga County schools for Trion. Milford Morgan, a small business owner and Chattooga County High School graduate of the early 1970s, said that he heard from his friends and fellow business people and professionals in town that “there’s no discipline; they’re swinging from the rafters. The perception was the schools weren’t safe.”⁶⁰ In spite of this public perception of safety issues and lack of discipline, the teachers I interviewed who remained at Chattooga throughout the 1980s and 1990s recall very few instances of big fights or other major safety issues. A number of these teachers kept their own

⁵⁸ Milford Morgan interview, 2012.

⁵⁹ Wylene Selman interview, 2012.

⁶⁰ Morgan interview, 2012.

children in Chattooga County Schools and were pleased with the education they received.⁶¹

Although racial fights did occur, according to Hixie Brewer and Wylene Selman, both of whom taught at Chattooga County High School from desegregation through the 1990s, these fights often were over interracial dating or “if a black boy said something to a white girl.”⁶²

Herein lay the other most commonly noted reason for transferring students to Trion from Chattooga. It was grounded in Myrdal’s original assumption that racial segregation in the United States was rooted in a single fear—racial amalgamation.⁶³ Echoing the sentiments of the racist Citizens Council, the whites of Chattooga County seemed less and less willing to risk interracial dating or intermarriage among their own children and their black peers. Along with the growing number of black students participating in sporting events and extracurricular activities emerged the equally growing fear of interracial dating and marriage. This, according to W.P. Selman, had been a concern of whites in the county from the beginning. It was this one concern, more than any other, he related, that was expressed repeatedly by whites at the town hall meetings conducted prior to the board’s decision to desegregate. Selman himself shared these concerns. Once again, he asserted, “I’m a southerner,”—implying that all southerners are white southerners—“and I hate intermarriage, and I can’t get that through my craw. Now, as far as integration is concerned, I can live with that, but if I see a show on TV with a black man and a white woman, I just turn it off. I’m a southerner.”⁶⁴

⁶¹ Will and Judy Hair interview; Hixie Brewer interview; Wylene Selman interview.

⁶² Hixie Brewer interview, 2012; Wylene Selman interview, 2012.

⁶³ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma, Vol. II* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1997) p. 582.

⁶⁴ W.P. Selman interview, 2012.

This same fear is what sparked many other white parents to withdraw their children from the county schools. More than any concerns over academics or athletics,⁶⁵ the concern over interracial dating, intertwined with issues of discipline, emerged as a common theme in most county residents' explanations for school transfers from Chattooga County to Trion City. According to former Summerville elementary teacher and later county school superintendent Mike Poole, the "rumor mill had it that black folks had taken over D-Hall⁶⁶ and white girls can't walk down the halls without getting touched by black boys."⁶⁷ Margaret and Larry Parker noted that they had been told that black boys were pinching white girls as they walked down the halls. Although they both agreed that the Trion Schools were not superior academically to Chattooga County, Margaret said, "I was not gonna have some black boy touching my daughters."⁶⁸

Interestingly, many of the Chattooga High School alumni who eventually transferred their children to Trion were also the ones who had discussed the easy transition into desegregated schools because so many whites had grown up with black domestic help. The relationship obviously had its limits, and it was not one between equals. One parent of Chattooga County High School graduates, who taught in the county, though she had graduated from Trion in the early 1970s, recalled a number of her friends, both school teachers and other professional people, who "admitted they were moving their children so they wouldn't have to be around the blacks." She knew of two mothers who sent their daughters to Trion because the girls liked black

⁶⁵ Several people interviewed indicated that students were withdrawn from Chattooga, particularly male students, because they could not compete with the African American boys for starting positions on basketball and football teams. Morgan interview, 2012.; Brewer interview, 2012.; Poole interview, 2006.

⁶⁶ The school was built with four main halls—A, B, C, and D with cross halls that connected them. D-Hall was the hall with the Band Room and 6 other classrooms.

⁶⁷ Mike Poole interview, 2006.

⁶⁸ Margaret Parker interview, 2012.

boys. According to Mrs. McGinnis, however, “It didn’t work. She’s got two black grandchildren, ... and ... she ended up marrying a black man.”⁶⁹

Regardless of the publicly stated reasons for large numbers of white school children transferring into the overwhelmingly white Trion City Schools, the ultimate motivator seemed to be race.⁷⁰ Although *The Summerville News* throughout the 1980s printed editorials displaying the discrepancy in SAT scores and graduation rates of Trion City Schools over Chattooga County Schools, Chattooga County students continued to graduate and attend prestigious universities including MIT, Vanderbilt, Georgia Tech, West Point, and many others.⁷¹ The general impression within the community was that Trion was the better school. As predicted in the 1960s by the editors of *The Council*, the newspaper publication of the Citizens Council, the longer desegregation continued, the more white students would choose to exit the fully desegregated county school system for a system where they could go to school with children “from similar home backgrounds.”⁷² Although most parents couched their concerns about their children’s education in terms of discipline or better academics, their reasoning seemed to come down to a desire to continue public schooling as it always had been—a way to “keep whites and blacks in their separate places.”⁷³ Because of demographics and other socioeconomic factors unique to

⁶⁹ Susan McGinnis interview, 2012.

⁷⁰ As noted in chapter 2, Chattooga High School’s student body was about 10% black, and Trion schools were 1% black or less. The percentage of African Americans in the schools never waiver far from these figures throughout the last two decades of the 20th century.

⁷¹ *The Summerville News*, various issues throughout the 1980s. Also, at least two different ads were taken out by parents of Chattooga High School graduates and teachers at Chattooga High School touting the accomplishments of its graduates.

⁷² Lanier interview, 2006.

⁷³ Margaret Gladney, *I’ll Take My Stand: The southern Segregation Academy Movement* (Ph.D. diss., University of New Mexico 1974) p. 8.; W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1941).

Chattooga County, desegregated schooling continued to exist in the county schools. For many of the working class and middle class whites of the county, however, segregated schooling at Trion became a way to enjoy the wages of whiteness whereby white students continued to benefit from “the best schools ... [and] schoolhouses ... [that] were the best in the community.”⁷⁴

By couching the enticement for students to come to Trion Schools in the language of “quality education,” the city schools actually began to provide better academics for their students. As Wylene Selman commented about the newspaper’s comparisons of test scores for Chattooga County and Trion City Schools, “It wasn’t fair. We had to take everybody, but they could just turn them away.”⁷⁵ Bill Kinzy, although proud of the accomplishments of Trion City Schools during his years as superintendent, recognized that his policy in Trion had created a two-tiered educational system in the county. He often reminded his principals of how their position in the county had made their jobs as administrators much less stressful than that of an administrator for the county schools.

I would have principals who would come into me and say I can take a job as a principal at Chattooga and make more money. And I said that’s because you got a better job. Tell me another public school in this state that you got 75% of your students that you don’t have to take. If they’re not performing and coming to school to get down to business, you don’t have to take ‘em. We don’t have to take the problems in Chattooga County. There’s not another school in the state of Georgia that’s got this high a percentage of non-resident kids. In Chattooga County, they got principals’ jobs opening all the time. You got the situation where you gotta take every kid no matter what. If you want to go, you go. I had very few administrators take that option.

⁷⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Atheneum 1992) 700-701.

⁷⁵ Wylene Selman interview, 2012.

W.J. Cash observes that, regarding most cultural icons, including schooling, the southern mind is “fundamentally continuous with the past.”⁷⁶ For this reason, desegregation in the small Appalachian county of Chattooga was entered into by whites, though hesitantly, with little anguish or commotion. It was a tremendous upheaval for the African American community, who greeted school integration in one of two ways—either as an almost religious revival or else as a complete disruption of life as they knew it.⁷⁷ However, for most Chattooga County white residents, particularly those with political clout, school desegregation initially had little impact on the segregated lifestyle they had always enjoyed. Like Chairman Selman, the white community saw this as a necessary hurdle to cross to “get the government to go its own way,” so that the county could continue to run its schools as it desired. The change in attitude toward desegregation occurred, however, when the whites of Chattooga County realized that school desegregation meant that they, too, would have to make changes and sacrifices. They wanted to go along with schooling as it always had been—geared toward the white students academically, socially, and athletically. When desegregation started to encroach on the white-dominated and white-controlled school system of their childhoods, a large number of middle class white parents in Chattooga County turned to the Trion School System as a segregated alternative.⁷⁸ This move seemed to confirm the prediction made in the 1960s by The Citizens Council when it printed the

⁷⁶ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1941) p. x.

⁷⁷In an interview with Linda Farmer Hawkins in 2012 she recalls, as they awaited school desegregation throughout the 1960s that she, along with all her African American peers at church were told by parents and church leaders, “It’s coming; it’s coming. Just be patient.” Although the impact on the black community of Chattooga County is beyond the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that school desegregation was viewed as a tremendous change, for good or for bad, within the black community as opposed to how it was viewed in the white community.

⁷⁸ Indicative of this change in mindset is that Chairman Selman in the 1970s removed his three sons from Chattooga schools and enrolled them in the private Darlington Schools in Rome, Georgia.

following statement. “Thus we have moved from segregation to ‘freedom of choice’ to compulsory integration... From this point on, it will be approaching segregation again.”⁷⁹

The availability of Trion City Schools as an alternate, largely segregated school system designed for the cultural norms of the middle class white community allowed the residents of Chattooga County to live with *de jure*, though not *de facto* desegregation. Movement of Chattooga County school age children into the Trion City Schools helped establish a public independent school system that was both racially more homogeneous and wealthier than its neighboring county school system.⁸⁰ By so doing, these whites fulfilled their continued goal for school desegregation which was “Not to transform a culture, but to perpetuate it.”⁸¹ For many middle class whites in Chattooga County, the existence of the Trion City Schools provided a legal means through which they could perpetuate the dual school system that existed prior to the *Brown* decision and prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. For many school children in Chattooga County, then, *de facto* school segregation continues to be an educational way of life.

⁷⁹ “Black Wednesday,” *The Citizen*, December 1969, p. 2.

⁸⁰ As noted in Chapter 2, Chattooga County’s student body is 10% African American and 77% of its students receive free or reduced lunch. The Trion student body is 1% African American and 30% of its students receive free and reduced lunch.

⁸¹ Medford Evans, “Citizen Power and Private Education,” *The Citizen*, December 1970, p. 14.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

It is apparent from this study that school desegregation as practiced in Chattooga County and in Georgia as a whole has not been the panacea of racial harmony envisioned by those who originally heralded it as the solution to racial inequality in southern segregated schools. Conversely, the transition from segregation to desegregation in Chattooga was accomplished with much less open turmoil than in many small counties across Georgia and the Southeast. This chapter examines possible meanings of Chattooga's experiences with school desegregation in light of the county's unique geographic and demographic condition, revisits some of the major findings of the research into school desegregation and racial identity while also offering some alternative interpretations and weaknesses of the findings. Further, the chapter places the study within the context of the literature, and examines its potential impact on both future research and policy making about school desegregation, school resegregation, and schooling in rural and Appalachian areas of Georgia and the Southeast.

Purpose of the study

As stated in the introduction, this study of school desegregation in Chattooga County was designed to uncover the role of whiteness, or white racial identity and white privilege, in the struggle to maintain racially segregated schooling in Chattooga County, an Appalachian county in Northwest Georgia. In addition, the study explores the role of politically powerful white elites in the state and the county in the protection of separate schooling for white and black children. As such, it joins that of other studies that define whiteness as the unspoken racial norm that

“places white people in dominant positions and grants white people unfair privileges, while rendering these positions and privileges invisible to white people themselves.”¹ In other words, whiteness is understood as the unspoken idea by white people in the United States that, as Gunnar Myrdal maintains, “No Negro can ever attain the status of even the *lowest* white.”² Researchers in the area of whiteness assert that maintenance of this belief that skin color has come to determine a person’s worth and value to society largely is maintained because race, for white people, is invisible. For people in the white community, white race and white customs and traditions are seen as normative and natural as opposed to the practices of “others.” Frankenberg makes a similar argument when she writes of whiteness that “it is the production and reproduction of ... normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.”³ Many of the findings in this dissertation reveal whiteness as that unspoken, unnamed sense of privilege through which white dominance was maintained in Georgia and in Chattooga County throughout the years prior to, and including school desegregation in the United States. Simply put by many white residents who grew up in Chattooga County in the 1960s in reference to segregated facilities and racially separated neighborhoods, “It’s just the way it was.” Whiteness, then, in many ways was a type of racial superiority that was maintained most effectively because of its invisibility to white people themselves. It simply was a way of life.

The theoretical construct of whiteness has been used as the lens through which to examine this one Georgia county’s encounter with school desegregation in the 1960s and the

¹ Meredith J. Green, Christopher C. Sonn, Jabulane Matsebula, “Reviewing Whiteness: Theory, Research, and Possibilities,” (online) *South African Journal of Psychology*, 37 (3), 2007, p. 390.

² Myrdal, p. 597.

³ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press), 1993, p. 236.

1970s. By so doing, the study continues the conversation started by Du Bois when he used the language of “whiteness” to discuss the psychological and social benefits, or “wages,” associated with white skin. Using the theoretical construct of whiteness to view actual historical events and their impacts on present day life in one Appalachian county, this study joins that of social historians like Grace Elizabeth Hale who have looked at events and eras in southern history to better understand the color line and how whiteness became a reality in the United States. Unlike Hale’s study, however, this work examines the impact of whiteness on a specific community in a specific time. It uncovers something of the realities of whiteness in a place and time when one of the bastions of white privilege, segregated schooling, was under attack. In this way, then, it moves the theory of whiteness into the mix of everyday life in one small community.

By so doing, the study shifts the focus of whiteness from how white racial identity was created, to the question of how this invisible racial identity influenced the lives of everyday southerners at a critical juncture in the region’s history. Recreating events in the struggle for desegregation through the words and stories of students, parents, and teachers whose lives were affected by this event, this community study begins to uncover how racial identity permeated the personal lives of white southerners whose everyday decisions perpetuated a power structure based largely on race. It follows more closely Deever’s study of racial power and power structures in Bulloch County, Georgia during desegregation. However, unlike Deever’s work it is unique both in its focus on racial identity as a central element in the struggle over school desegregation and in its choice of a rural Appalachian community with a small African American population as its setting. An Appalachian county with a small African American population and a relatively peaceful implementation of school desegregation may seem an unlikely source of information about whiteness. What makes it valuable is the many insights that the study of

Chattooga County offers into the role of whiteness in the struggle surrounding school desegregation. What is revealed in the study of this community is that the size of the African American community in relation to the size of the white community did little to mitigate the impact of white racial identity and white dominance in the struggle to desegregate. Even in Chattooga County, an Appalachian community with an African American population under 15%, the power structure based on white privilege and white dominance was ingrained into the fabric of everyday life.

Findings

The study of Chattooga County and its white community's experiences with school desegregation indicates much about both the role of white racial identity in this small Appalachian county as well as in the southern Appalachian region as a whole. In addition, the study also outlines the role of Georgia and Chattooga County's politically and economically powerful elites as they struggled to maintain white dominance in the state and in the county. The stories of the residents of Chattooga County and the rhetoric of state and regional officials about school desegregation indicate that much of the controversy accompanying desegregation resulted from a desire to protect the wages of whiteness.

Social class and whiteness

When Du Bois wrote of the "wages of whiteness," he referred to the social, economic, and political benefits that were bestowed on American workers simply for having white skin. As such, Du Bois and other historians, including Roediger and Grace Elizabeth Hale, argue that the definition of European Americans laborers as "white" rather than as working class was the result of a deliberate effort undertaken by elites in America in the early Twentieth and late Nineteenth Centuries to maintain their own political and economic power. This paper proceeds under the

assumption that the establishment of this racial identity and the privileges associated with white skin were well established by the 1960s when school desegregation became a way of life in the southeastern United States.

In a purely Du Boisean sense, the decision of the white power brokers in Chattooga County to proceed with school desegregation through peaceful means represents a departure from early Twentieth Century efforts to create a single white racial identity that melded European American workers with their wealthier owners rather than with their fellow workers of African heritage. Rather than maintaining the color line, one interpretation of events in Chattooga County is that, unlike rural counties outside the Appalachian regions of the southeast, the wages of whiteness were defeated. Instead of maintaining the color line, the middle class and upper class members of this mountain community left the poorest of the white working class—the mill laborers and the non-landed members of the community—to fend for themselves. Overwhelmingly, the poorest whites in the county, because of transportation restrictions and lack of income, remained in the integrated county school system while the middle class and wealthier whites of the county left the Chattooga County schools to enroll their children in either Trion schools or in more exclusive private schools outside the county. However, this conclusion fails to account for the *de facto* segregation that existed within the schools of Chattooga County at least two centuries following legal desegregation. In addition, it is important to note that the tuition required for students to enter Trion City Schools was minimal—originally \$25 per student, and currently \$150 per student. For this reason, the Trion student body was not, and is not, comprised solely of upper class professionals, land owners, and merchants, but of a mixture of these upper and upper middle class young people along with the children of mill workers, blue collar workers, and others of lower middle class status in the county. To some degree, then, admission

to an almost fully segregated school system perpetuated the idea that the white worker could one day hope to join the elite white upper class simply because they shared the same skin color. The children of blue collar and white collar white families alike continued to benefit from the better education at the better funded school in the county. Despite this reality, however, what is ignored in this conclusion is the impact of social class rather in conjunction with race on the development of the Trion City School System as the school of choice among large numbers of whites in Chattooga County. More study is needed of the reaction of the county's lower socio-economic classes to desegregation to untangle the multiple causes of the dual educational system that emerged in Chattooga in the 1960s and 1970s.

Role of Elite Whites on State and Regional Level

Whether in state government or in self-avowed white supremacist groups like the Citizens Council, the political and economic power brokers in Georgia and the Southeast were at the center of the fight to maintain segregated schooling. The rhetoric of Georgia's political and economic leaders throughout the 1960s and 1970s indicates the lengths to which members of the state's white power structure would go to preserve the color line and white dominance in the area of education. Speeches made by Georgia governors from Ernest Vandiver to Lester Maddox attest to the idea that Georgia's best interests were served by serving the best interests of the white community. Segregated schooling, according to these leaders, was the desire of people from both races. Governor Vandiver, in his 1961 speech on the racial desegregation of the University of Georgia, argued that "compulsory association of the races through enforced integration would be detrimental to the peace, good order, and tranquility of the state and detrimental to progress, harmony, and good relations between the races."⁴ Even in his

⁴ Ernest Vandiver speech, January 12, 1961.

introduction to the speech in which he claims to speak on behalf of all Georgians who “hold fast to a common heritage,” Vandiver gives evidence of the basic unnamed assumption of whiteness that the common heritage of the South is the desire for a color line by which the lowliest of whites was considered superior to the most accomplished blacks simply because of skin color.

More than a decade following acceptance of token desegregation in Georgia’s schools, the state continued to elect leaders whose public rhetoric endorsed segregated schooling for the purposes of maintaining so-called “racial integrity.”⁵ For many of Georgia’s white political elite, tacit school desegregation was in no way indicative of elite whites’ abandonment of the principles of whiteness and of white privilege. The end of massive resistance was not, then, an abandonment of the old principles of white dominance and white privilege. Instead, as confirmed by the report of Georgia’s Sibley Commission, it was a way for the white southern power brokers to avoid federal interference with this mainstay of white privilege—school segregation. Confirming the findings of historians including Robert Pratt, Bryan Deever, and Jeff Roche, this examination of the leaders in Georgia and in Chattooga County reveals more of a shift in the articulation of power rather than a relinquishing of the power structure itself. What is evident in the words and actions of the state’s political leaders is that their aim always was to preserve a better quality education for white children and that they saw this as a fundamental premise of southern culture.

Although, like most Appalachian counties with a small African American population, the white residents of Chattooga County practiced white racial privilege through more moderate displays, their actions reflect views similar to those expressed by the whites across Georgia and

⁵ Lester Maddox, “State of the State Address,” January 13, 1970, p. 342. Lester Maddox, “Speech to Lilburn Elementary School, December 11, 1968.

the southeast. The Chattooga County school board chair made the decision to desegregate the schools based solely on his conviction that doing so would keep control of the schools in local hands. His statement that a vote for total school integration would “tell the federal government to go its own way, and we could keep our school system the way we wanted to”⁶ indicates the true motives of the county’s power brokers in the face of school desegregation. The belief among many in the county was that because of the small percentage of black students in the system and because the power remained in the hands of an all-white school board and an all-white administrative team, desegregation could be accomplished with little impact on the white community or its schools. For the economic and political leaders of Chattooga County, *de jure* desegregation marked a path through which to maintain the color line that, though unarticulated, remained a mainstay of white privilege.⁷

That control of education remained in the hands of Chattooga’s white power brokers is substantiated by looking at the implementation of desegregation itself. As Bill Kinzy indicated, there was no integration of the black and white schools of Chattooga County. The black students simply were brought into the white school and expected to adapt to the traditions and customs of the white school and the white community. There was little or no consideration by the school board or other members of the community about blending the black school traditions with those of the white school. The only reason that desegregation was accomplished without violence and

⁶ W.P. Selman interview, 2012.

⁷ Derrick Bell speaks of a similar concept when he writes of “interest convergence covenant” which he defines as the recognition and protection of rights by policymakers as long as the advancement of such rights further interests that are the “primary concern” of the white decision makers. Derrick Bell, *Silent Covenants: Brown v. Board of Education and the Unfulfilled Hopes for Racial Reform*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 49. In Jerome Morris, , “Research, Ideology, and the *Brown* Decision: Counter-narratives to the Historical and Contemporary Representation of Black Schooling,” *Teachers College Record* 110 no. 4, April 2008, p. 719

turmoil on the part of the county's white residents was that those in positions of authority foresaw few changes in the schools and the power structure within the community. The overriding, though unspoken message to both the black and white residents of Chattooga County was that desegregation could take place without relinquishing the material and psychological wages associated with being white. In the case of school desegregation, the social and the academic lives of schoolchildren were controlled by the white community. Any change to take place would come, not from the white community, but from the black community. What might be identified as the "white" school mascot and the "white" school colors were accepted without question from the white community, both before and after desegregation, as the community's mascot and the community's school colors. The underlying message of whiteness was that school spirit and school pride were tied to the white community's definition of what it meant to be a Chattooga Indian.

Although conducting his research from the perspective of the Africa American community, Jerome Morris similarly emphasizes the often destructive effects of a school desegregation process that placed the "arduous task of desegregating on Black educators, schools, and students."⁸ Morris primarily points to African American scholars who recently have made the case for a "counter-narrative" to the mainstream version that all-black schools were inferior in every aspect to all-white schools prior to the *Brown* decision. These researchers contend that the desegregation of schools, as implemented in places like Chattooga County, was often detrimental to the academic and social success of many black schoolchildren because it operated under the assumption that the white community had much more to offer the black

⁸ Jerome Morris, "Research, Ideology, and the *Brown* Decision: Counter-narratives to the Historical and Contemporary Representation of Black Schooling," *Teachers College Record* 110 no. 4, April 2008, p. 719.

community in terms of culture and values and that the black community had virtually nothing to offer in return.⁹ This study of Chattooga County, though from the perspective of the white community, seems to support that position. Not only did the black teachers in the county lose their jobs, but they were never replaced; black students in Chattooga County, following desegregation, had almost no role models within the schools of college-educated black teachers. In this way, then, desegregation actually diminished the tacit control over education held by black teachers and administrators prior to school desegregation.

The wages of whiteness

Although much of the impetus for continued segregated schooling emerged from a belief among whites in the state and county that African Americans were inherently inferior to whites intellectually, the real power of white racial identity rested in the unspoken and accepted idea by white residents of Chattooga County that being white was defined, as Hale describes it, as being the one in a position of superiority based solely on skin color. On the state level, this unspoken benefit of white skin was evident in the assumption by governors and state legislators alike that an innate part of “southern heritage”¹⁰ was acceptance of segregated schooling and white dominance. For Georgia governor Lester Maddox, the promotion of segregated schooling was tantamount to “standing for America.”¹¹ From the passage of state legislation to shut down public schools rather than desegregate, to the acceptance of limited desegregation by state leaders who were openly segregationist, the actions of Georgia’s power brokers reflected a belief

⁹ Morris, p. 717.

¹⁰ Governor Ernest Vandiver, “Public Education Address.”

¹¹ Governor Lest Maddox, “Speech to Citizens Council of America.”

that loyalty to the state and to the nation was defined in the white community as loyalty to separate schooling and perpetuation of superior education for white children.

The same unspoken sentiment resonated throughout the interviews with white residents of Chattooga County. School board chair Selman perhaps best articulated this phenomena when he used the phrase “I am a southerner” to explain his distaste for integrated schooling and, more specifically, interracial dating. For him, being southern meant being white and supporting the extant color line that maintained white dominance. Similarly, the acceptance of the segregated stores, restaurants, movie theaters, and bus stations by Chattooga County whites as “the way things were” places the idea of whiteness and white privilege in an invisible realm both unnamed and unchallenged. For children growing up in a society dominated by white racial privilege, division of the races and white superiority were simply a way of life. For this reason, residents of Chattooga County faced school desegregation with little fear of either violence or of substantive change to their white-dominated schools. The belief that desegregation could take place with little or no substantive change to the extant color line explains the relative ease with which school desegregation was implemented. Unlike rural counties in the southern part of the state, Chattooga County’s small African American population meant that whites, at least in their estimation, could maintain control of the schools and of the power structure within them even after desegregation took place.

Almost every middle class family and some working class families in the county had grown up with black women in their homes as maids and nannies.¹² Few feared sitting in class with black children following desegregation because, they explained, they had grown up with

¹² Margaret Parker, Larry Parker, and Mike Poole are among those interviewed who grew up in working class families that had black women and black men working in their homes as domestic help.

black people. The relational inequality that characterized these associations was unperceived by either the white children or their parents. Speaking of the black couple who took care of her most of her life, Margaret Parker says, “I loved them and they loved me.” What remains invisible in this characterization of the relationship is that it was based on the old paternalistic notion of the superior white employer and the inferior black employee. Like whiteness itself, this relational inequality was an unspoken, well accepted way of life. The wages of whiteness meant that the white residents of Chattooga County, though willing to share their schools with the black residents, if forced to by law, could not imagine blacks and whites as equals. Although Milford Morgan’s grandfather was seen as gracious for allowing his black neighbors to buy coal from him on credit, this action perpetuated the established racial norms that allowed white merchants to see themselves as superior to black workers. It never occurred to these merchants that providing equal opportunities for their neighbors in both education and employment would afford the county’s black residents the income needed to adequately care for themselves and their families.

The invisible wages of whiteness worked to prevent any prospect of social and economic equality. Following school desegregation, the schools continued to provide their African American students with a less challenging curriculum because, as principal Kinzy asserts, he could not expect the same academic performance from his black students that he did from his white students. The accommodating attitude is reminiscent of David Roediger and Grace Elizabeth Hale’s commentaries that African Americans were denied access to educational opportunities and then were condemned by white society for being less educated.¹³ In Chattooga

¹³ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (New York: Verso), 1993; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books) 1998.

County, the all-white school boards under-funded the school grounds, school teachers, and school curriculum for black children, and then characterized them as intellectually inferior to white students because of their lack of formal education.

The initial smooth transition of the Chattooga County schools from segregation to desegregation resulted from a belief that the change could be made with little or no effect on either the extant power structure or the quality of education for the white children of the county. The all-white school board, dominated by property owners from around the county, maintained its hold on the school system. In addition, the schools themselves, though desegregated in theory, remained largely segregated. Few, if any, black students sat in upper level classrooms, black and white students sat in different areas of the cafeteria, basketball became the sport reserved primarily for black students while football and baseball were largely dominated by white students. The few black students who joined the white teams were accepted because they were viewed by white students and parents as no threat to the established order. Although the schools were desegregated, they were never integrated. Most white students saw few changes in their daily routines. Thus, white racial superiority never was threatened by school desegregation in this Appalachian county. By agreeing to desegregate on their own terms and in their own time, the schools of Chattooga County had, as W.P. Selman had hoped, maintained a school system still under local white control. For the first ten years after desegregation, there was little noticeable difference in the schooling of the county's white children.

Similar patterns of relatively peaceful transition to desegregation were seemingly characteristic of many schools in the southern Appalachian region. Betty Reed's recent extensive study of African American schools in Western North Carolina reveals a number of communities who desegregated with little or no violence. Though telling her story primarily from the

perspective of the African American community, she details a number of Appalachian counties, all with a small African American population, that worked to delay desegregation as long as possible, but that eventually desegregated with little fanfare. Even in these counties, however, she reports that African American students often faced intimidation or perceived unfair treatment from white administrators following desegregation.¹⁴ Similar to the trends found in Chattooga County, Reed reveals that, despite the small number of African American students in many school systems in western North Carolina's Appalachian region, recent data reveal patterns of resegregation in these western Carolina counties. Though the numbers are less evident in Appalachian counties like Chattooga with small African American populations, the drift toward resegregation is not unlike that found in non-mountain southern regions with larger percentages of African American students..

In Chattooga County, the seemingly smooth transition toward desegregation began to unravel as the schools entered the second decade of desegregation. Many white parents saw the traditional role of white identity under attack, and began to look for alternative schooling for their children. Black students were more visible in the schools. They were joining social clubs, winning spots on the cheerleading and football squads over white students, and, perhaps most frightening to white parents, associating with their white peers in dating and other social settings. Though often unarticulated in public, for many white parents this was an unacceptable threat to the racial order that had defined southern society throughout the early 20th century. Feeling their traditional racial identity undermined, many white parents looked for a way to return to the racial

¹⁴ Betty J. Reed, *School Segregation in Western North Carolina: A History, 1860s to 1970s* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011). In this book, Reed writes of one black student in Buncombe County, NC being threatened on his way into the formerly all-white school with a bullet that "had his name on it." Similarly, she tells of two other young men being pelted by rocks outside a teacher's window. Although the desegregation was carried out without overwhelming violence, the desire for segregated schooling continued. See Introduction, p. 9.

hierarchy they had known as children. Instilled with the unspoken belief that blacks were not to be trusted, and with the fear of racial “amalgamation” at the fore of their worries, parents of Chattooga County’s white school students found a way to “perpetuate” the culture of their youth: they moved their children into the overwhelmingly all-white schools of Trion. As the leaders of the Citizens Council had predicted, when the threat to white identity became a reality, the white schoolchildren in Chattooga County began a steady march backward toward the segregated schooling of the past. For many of the most prominent white families in the community, there seemed to be little choice. Maintenance of the color line required that their children go to school in an environment where white racial identity was safe, where their children won the best spots on the athletic teams, and where they were “safe” from the fear of interracial dating. Trion City Schools offered the parents and children of the county this option. The movement of white students from the desegregated schools of the county to the almost homogeneous all-white schools of Trion was designed, like the original decision to desegregate the schools, not to transform a culture based on whiteness and white superiority, but to perpetuate that culture in the age of legal school desegregation.

The place of the study in the literature

By using whiteness as a lens through which to view one small mountain community’s experience with school desegregation, the study of Chattooga County holds a unique place in both the whiteness literature and the historical literature of school desegregation. Its significance lies in its movement of the whiteness issue into a more contemporary community setting. This study of whiteness and school desegregation provides a venue in which to view both the historical and the ongoing influence of white racial identity on actual events in a small Appalachian county. Whereas a number of accounts recently have used whiteness as a construct

through which to examine specific historical time periods,¹⁵ none has used it as a way to better understand the struggle to desegregate the South's public schools. In this way, then, this work makes the case that whiteness and the perpetuation of white privilege and white racial identity were major factors, not only in the initial struggle to maintain segregated schooling, but in the continuing struggle over desegregation and resegregation of those schools throughout the last half of the twentieth century.

In addition, the study shows that for many parents the overriding reason for leaving the county school system was not only what Thomas Pearce Bailey saw as the "real crux of the question,"¹⁶ so-called racial "amalgamation," but also the whole image created by southern whites of blacks as racial "other." For this reason, once they saw school desegregation leading to increased racial integration within the schools, white parents began transferring their children to what they believed to be a safer environment. Despite the lack of concrete evidence of increased violence or decreased academic performance in the Chattooga County schools, white parents determined their children were "safer" among other children from similar backgrounds.

Although the study's focus largely is limited to events in Chattooga County and the state of Georgia during the 1960s and the 1970s, the movement of white students out of the county schools and into Trion City Schools is an ongoing process similar to the process being repeated in communities throughout the rural South. Perhaps the study can begin a conversation among

¹⁵ Hale, *Making Whiteness*. Brattain, *Race, Politics, and Workers in the Modern South*. Hale's work examines how the post-Reconstruction South created a distinct white racial identity through implementation of Jim Crow laws and through development of entertainment and other cultural phenomena that pictured white culture as "normal," and black culture as both exotic and inferior. Brattain's work concentrates on the development of whiteness in the labor force and the political maneuverings used by Georgia politicians to use whiteness as a way to win votes.

¹⁶ Thomas Pearce Bailey, *Race Orthodoxy in the South and Other Aspects of the Race Question* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1914), p. 2, as quoted in Myrdal, p. 587.

historians, educators, and sociologists alike about white racial identity as an aggravating force in this continuing struggle with school resegregation.

Not only does the story of Chattooga County's struggle with school desegregation add to the continuing conversation about resegregation, it also expands the historical literature on school desegregation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In particular, it sheds light into the period in which Georgia in particular, and the southern states as a whole, emerged from the era of massive resistance to what Jeff Roche refers to as "restructured resistance."¹⁷ More recent scholarship continues this conversation about the time following massive resistance when southern white politicians and white communities rejected outright defiance in favor of a more "sophisticated approach" to resistance of the *Brown* decision.¹⁸ According to Anders Walker, the moderate agenda established in the 1960's continued segregationist trends in the guise of racial moderation. Progressive governors such as Collins of Florida, Hodges of North Carolina, and Coleman of Mississippi, recognized that segregation was part of the "social fabric" of the South and that it would not disappear with the alteration of a few laws.¹⁹ As such, with great deliberation and intention, this "progressive" group of politicians set out a new agenda by which they projected, not a desire to maintain racial superiority, but a desire for "racial pluralism" that they claimed was the desire of both whites and blacks. Whether through the work of these governors or the modernists like Sibley and the School Committee, the notion among white progressives was that desegregation would be minimal because of the growing movement of

¹⁷ Jeff Roche, *Restructured Resistance: The Sibley Commission and the Politics of Desegregation in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Anders Walker, *The Ghost of Jim Crow: How Southern Moderates Used Brown v. Board of Education to Stall Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ Walker, p. 9.

whites into either private schools or the suddenly burgeoning predominantly white suburbs. The fight of massive resistance was unnecessary, and ultimately, in the eyes of progressive southern leaders, it did more harm to the South and its efforts to modernize than it did good.

The study of Chattooga County furthers the examination of school desegregation in the South following the years of massive resistance by offering a unique perspective on this process in a county that, though rural, is representative of the mountain regions of Georgia rather than the rural “black belt” region where racial demographics often led to more violent confrontations over desegregation. This work is one of the few that looks at the unfolding of school desegregation in a southern Appalachian community. Because rural Appalachian counties had smaller black populations than did counties across the South’s old plantation belt, little has been written about these communities’ experiences during the years of forced school desegregation. Although in the past many scholars portrayed race relations in Appalachia as more harmonious than those found in rural southern communities where black residents largely outnumber their white neighbors, more recent scholarship has revealed a much more complex medley of race relations within the highland regions of the southern United States.²⁰ Little work, however, has been completed that moves the research of race relations in Appalachia into the twentieth century, or into the debate over school desegregation.

The study of race in Chattooga County during the struggle over desegregation indicates that for this particular mountain community the peaceful co-existence of white and black neighbors was based largely on the acceptance of a racial hierarchy in which whites benefited from the wage associated with skin color. Examination of the prevalence of these attitudes

²⁰ John C. Inscoe, ed., *Appalachians and Race: The Mountain South from Slavery to Segregation* (Lexington, Ky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2001).

throughout the region requires further study in other small southern Appalachian towns and counties. As such, it adds more voices to the gradually evolving chronicle of the struggle over school desegregation in the South. In 2000, Charles Eagle's comprehensive historiography of civil rights era research emphasized the need for more community studies of desegregation and the civil rights movement in the rural south. In particular, he recognized the failure by historians to probe the "complex political, economic, and cultural dimensions of southern white society to explain how and why whites held the racial attitudes they did."²¹

Areas for further research

As with most community studies, this examination of school desegregation in Chattooga County serves only as the beginning of a conversation among historians and other social scientists about the role of whiteness in the desegregation of schools in Georgia. Because it is a snapshot of a single community during a single moment in history, the role played by whiteness in this small southern Appalachian county is not necessarily part of the experiences of communities across Georgia, the Southeast, or even the Appalachian region of the Southeast. Obviously, a county with a small African American population had different experiences with race and school desegregation than a county in south Georgia where whites often were a minority. What is revealed is a sense that, despite the small percentage of blacks who comprised its population, Chattooga County's white community continued to look for alternate schooling for their children in a system that was overwhelmingly both white and segregated.

Not only would the study of Chattooga County benefit from additional investigations of similar communities across the South, but the study itself would benefit from deeper research

²¹ Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Southern History*, 66, no. 4 (November 2000) p. 843.

into the functioning of social class. To better understand the intersections of race and class on the reaction of the white community toward school desegregation, finer distinctions must be drawn between the attitudes and actions of the county's poorest members and its elite power brokers. Concentrating on the school desegregation experiences of working class whites in Appalachian counties across the South would provide deeper insight into the variations of the experiences of working class and middle and upper class whites about race and desegregation. Implications of this kind of work are manifold because it is largely the poorest whites in these rural counties who remain in the mostly desegregated schools while the middle and upper class whites, like those in Chattooga County, continue to find alternatives for maintaining *de facto* segregation. An evaluation of the differences between working class and middle or upper class families' experiences with, and attitudes toward, desegregation would provide greater clarity on the role of class in maintenance of white identity and white privilege.

This failure to examine more deeply the experiences with school desegregation of Chattooga's poorest workers is essentially this work's greatest flaw. To fully explore the idea of whiteness as defined by Du Bois as a way for elite whites to maintain control over working class whites by having them define themselves according to race instead social class status requires a deliberate unearthing of the working class voice. Although the whites in the county who enrolled their children in the Trion Schools were not upper class, and seldom were college educated, they also were not the poorest members of Chattooga County's working class. For the most part, the county residents who attended Trion Schools were drawn from various sectors of the working class and professional class of this poor county. Many of the county's wealthiest citizens—primarily large landholders and doctors or lawyers—withdraw their children from either of the

county systems to attend private schools in either Chattanooga or Rome.²² In this sense, then, it appears that rather than fighting to maintain the extant color line as a source of division between black and white workers, the leaders in Chattooga County and Trion City actually created a pathway through which the middle class and upper working class residents might abandon those in the lowest socio-economic bracket to the more racially diverse county school system. Analysis of such a view requires more intentional search for the voices of the underclass whites. Evidence from such a search might reveal that the division between the Trion and Chattooga school systems has as much to do with socio-economic differences as it does with racial identity and racial differences.

In addition to further study of the poorest white residents and their reactions to desegregation, the study also would benefit from further research into the reaction of Chattooga County's black community toward desegregation. Although some research was done on the background of education for blacks in the county, and a few interviews were held with black residents who had been students during the years of desegregation, the experiences of a cross-section of Chattooga's black community is not represented in this work. Data on the black perspective of school desegregation and the race relations in the county before and after desegregation not only tell their own rich story, but also serve as a source for greater insight into the white community's perceptions of race and privilege. The value of such a comparison is evident in the conflicting perceptions of those who had grown up under the care of a black nanny with the perceptions of the black children who had grown up with a mother who often was

²² For example, several years after desegregation, the Chattooga County board chair, W.P. Selman withdrew his children from Chattooga County schools to enroll them in the Darlington Schools in Rome, Georgia. Gene McGinnis, whose father was a pharmacist in Summerville and whose mother taught school at Chattooga County High School, attended a private school in Chattanooga from tenth grade onward.

absent from her own home because she worked as the nanny for someone else's children. The white children and parents who relied on the help of these black women, and some black men, imagined this relationship was one based on affection and gratitude on the part of the black worker. They never imagined that intermingled with these feelings of affection were feelings of resentment. For the white community, this paternalistic, disparate relationship was perceived as "normal." Similarly, comparing the first African American students' perceptions of their early days of school in the newly desegregated Chattooga High School with the white students' characterization of these days as uneventful, would provide greater insight into the forces of whiteness itself. Analyses of the divergent perceptions of black and white county residents on school desegregation may help uncover aspects of whiteness that, for the white community at least, were accepted as part of the natural order of life in a community governed by the unarticulated forces of white privilege and white dominance.

The study of Chattooga County is unique in its design to study a specific community and its struggles with school desegregation through the lens of whiteness. By applying the theoretical construct of whiteness to a specific white community at a specific place in time it removes the study of white race identity from its theoretical pedestal and places it in the milieu of everyday life in this southern mountain community. As such, the study of this white community and its experiences with, and perceptions of race and school desegregation is a continuation of the whiteness works of historians like David Roediger and Grace Elizabeth Hale who focus on the origins of whiteness both before and after the Civil War and Reconstruction. Building on these earlier whiteness studies, this story examines, not the origins of whiteness, but rather its perpetuation as played out in the lives of policy makers, parents, and educators in the everyday business of educating one county's youth during the years of court-ordered desegregation.

Although further research is needed to paint a more complete picture of the impact of the desire to maintain the psychological and material wages of whiteness on the struggle over school desegregation in Chattooga County, this study offers evidence that maintenance of the color line was a primary motivator in the path taken by the county on its way toward school desegregation. Even though school desegregation in Chattooga County, as in many counties throughout southern Appalachia, was achieved earlier and with less strife than in other areas of Georgia and the Southeast, this was not indicative of a white community willing to relinquish its own racial superiority. Instead, the words and actions of the educational leaders, students, parents, and teachers who lived daily with school desegregation reveal a people who accepted the racial hierarchy that was a part of the very fabric of their community, and who believed that they could maintain this hierarchy even in the face of legal school desegregation. That it was a hierarchy both unspoken and invisible to the white members of the community who benefited most from its preservation further indicates the integral role of whiteness in this community. As researchers such as Frankenberg assert, it is this perception of white privilege and white racial identity as simply the “way things were”—as an accepted social order beyond question—that made white privilege then, and continue to make it today, so difficult to overcome.

Schools in Chattooga County, similar to the schools throughout Georgia, desegregated under the control of white men who were themselves segregationists. Their belief was that by agreeing to legal desegregation they could run the schools according to their own design and could, thereby, perpetuate the color line as it always had existed. What many in the white community discovered, however, was that over time old social structures within the schools began to fade. Old white fears of racial amalgamation and racial equality once again emerged among members of the county’s white community. To maintain the privileges traditionally

associated with whiteness and white skin, many Chattooga County parents found a new path toward maintenance of the color line. The Trion City Schools, for many working, middle and upper class parents in Chattooga County, became a place where they could return to the segregated community of their past. In the end, the Trion schools emerged as the public school alternative where white parents could feel safe as they chose “not to transform a culture, but to perpetuate it.” The culture they chose, and continue to choose, is that of a segregated society in which the wages of whiteness are firmly intact. Perhaps further research into other mountain and rural counties in the state will provide the insight needed to deal with the issues of resegregation that plague the schools across the southeastern United States today. It is at this point, then, that policy makers must examine the historical role of whiteness as played out in the school desegregation decisions of the 1960s and 1970s as a way to understand and to meet the challenges of resegregation facing public school systems throughout most regions of the United States.

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APPENDIX A

RESEARCH METHODS AND POSITIONALITY

Before proceeding with the reporting of data, it is important to explain the theoretical and practical methods used to collect data. For these purposes, the section reveals the qualitative methods employed and the research upon which this choice was made. In addition, the section outlines the specific research methods employed to collect data in this historical case study of Chattooga County schools.

Research Methods

Because qualitative researchers are interested in how people “make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world,”¹ this study of the role of whiteness in the struggle over desegregation in rural Georgia lends itself to the qualitative research approaches. The focus of the study is the actual experience, thoughts, and perceptions of the rural whites who daily encountered the changes wrought by the forces of school desegregation. To accomplish this goal, it is necessary to recreate, not a small part of life in a rural southern county, but rather to reveal “how all the parts work together to form a whole.”² This binding together of all the parts into a larger picture from which may emerge an understanding both of the nature of whiteness and its role in the struggle over school desegregation in rural Georgia and of the inter-workings of this single rural Georgia community is best accomplished through a qualitative research design.

¹ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Publishers 1998) p. 6.

² Merriam, p. 6.

More specifically, the qualitative method used in this project is that of an historical case study. A case study is “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit.” It is, therefore, the study of a “unit around which there are boundaries.”³ The two-fold purpose of the case study, as described by Becker, is “to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of the groups under study” and “to develop general theoretical statements about regularities in social structure and process.”⁴ Historical case studies involve the merger of elements of both historical research and case study. Siddle Walker followed a similar design in her study of schooling in a single African American community in the rural South. Siddle Walker labels her study of Caswell County, North Carolina, an “historical ethnography.” It is historical, she contends, because it reconstructs a unique culture that no longer exists with attention given to chronology and content. At the same time, it also is ethnographic because it “provides a cultural understanding of an environment from the perspective of the environment’s participants.”⁵ Similarly, this study of Chattooga County seeks not only to recreate the events surrounding the desegregation of the schools in the county, but also to understand the meaning or values associated with those events from the perspective of the individuals who witnessed and participated in the struggle.

Because this study is both historical and ethnographic, I have used data collection methods characteristic of both historical and qualitative research traditions. In historical research, the investigator relies on primary documents, secondary documents, and cultural and physical

³ Merriam, p. 27.

⁴ H. S. Becker, “Social Observation and Social Case Studies,” In *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Vol. 11 (New York: Crowell 1968) p. 233.

⁵ Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential; An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press 1996) p. 221.

artifacts. However, because historical case studies may deal with events from the not-so-distant past, they also rely on the tools of qualitative research—direct observation and interviews.⁶ The aspect of historical case studies most relevant to this study is that the underlying purpose of the historical case study is to understand an event or phenomenon from the past and then to “apply that knowledge to present practice.”⁷ By looking at whiteness and its role in the struggle over school desegregation in a single rural county in Georgia, the study addresses issues of both historical and contemporary concern. From the perspective of the whiteness research, the case study method extends the current literature into a more contemporary and more southern setting. For those educators involved with the issue of school policy on a local and state level, the historical case study provides a detailed picture of the roots of what is today an ongoing resistance to integrated public schooling.

Positionality

In my role as qualitative researcher, I necessarily am the primary instrument for both data collection and data analysis. As such, I must necessarily identify the personal values and assumptions I bring into this study. My interest in racial identity as an underlying cause of southern whites’ struggle over desegregation emerges from both my family roots in the rural white South, as well as my experiences as a student and an educator in Georgia’s integrated public schools. Because I was raised by a mother whose childhood was spent in the segregated rural South as the daughter of a poor uneducated farmer, my first encounters with over racial prejudice came during family reunions and other encounters with members of my extended

⁶ R. K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 1994) p. 8 In Merriam, p. 36.

⁷ Merriam, p. 35.

family. In addition, as a white southern female and mother of young children, I often am involved in experience with neighbors who inform me of their decisions to remove their own children from the increasingly diverse public schools because these are no longer like they were when “we were growing up.”

Growing up in Atlanta, Georgia, I attended an urban southern high school with a majority African American student population. As I reflect on my experiences in this multiethnic school, however, I realize that even this school was a segregated environment because nearly 98% of the students in the “honors” classes were white skinned. After leaving high school and entering the teaching profession, I found in every school I taught that true integration seldom, if ever, existed. In the wealthier suburban school, the classes were populated almost exclusively with white faces. In the small towns and counties where I taught, the halls often were filled with students of varying colors and shades. Even so, the honors and gifted classes primarily were composed of white students, while the remedial classes were the domain of children of color. As I visited small, rural towns, and even some larger counties, it became increasingly clear that the middle class and professional whites in these areas saw little value in sending their children to the public schools available to them. In these cases, the public schools were being re-segregated—not by court order, but by the choice of white parents with some economic means. When I moved to Chattooga County, I found a rural county of almost 25,000 people that supported two school systems. Although both systems are public, the city system has an African American school body of less than one percent. White parents throughout this small county send their children to the city school system at their own expense rather than sending them to the larger, more diverse, county system in whose district they live. I wanted to understand the forces that drove these

white parents to take their children out of their assigned schools. That became the main impetus for my research into whiteness and its role in the desegregation of rural Georgia schools.

My experiences as both a white southern female and as an educator in Georgia's public schools mean that I bring certain views into this study. Although I will make every effort to listen without prejudice to the unfolding story of this one white community's experience with school desegregation, I am aware of my own personal bias on the desegregation of public schooling in the South. I bring to this study a distaste for the view of many southerners who desired the maintenance of segregated schooling in the South. Even so, because I grew up surrounded by people with backgrounds and attitudes similar to many of those I will interview in Chattooga County, I also acknowledge something of the tension that exists within these rural whites who saw their way of life turned upside down. Regardless of my strong belief that these changes were part of a much needed overhaul in southern society in both Georgia and the rural South as a whole, I also recognize the difficulty of this drastic overhaul for the white southerners who dealt with the effects of these changes daily. This appreciation for the lives of these people tempers my biases and allows me to listen to the story of Chattooga County without animosity and with limited pre-determined judgments.

An important aspect of this study is that many of the people included are my neighbors. I have lived in Chattooga County for nine years, and have taught in both the Trion City Schools and the Chattooga County Schools. Currently, I teach social studies at Chattooga County High School, the largest school in the county. My experiences within both these systems provide an interesting perspective on the history of both systems and each one's place in the community. Although I am still an "outsider" in Chattooga County, because the majority of the people who live here also grew up here, I have made good friendships with parents, teachers, and community

members with ties to both systems. The rivalry between the two high schools is intense, and the sense amongst most newcomers to the community is that Trion is the better school. When I first moved to the area, I was told in an interview that, because the majority of their students live out of district and pay tuition to attend the school, it is as close to a private school as a public school can get. This feeling resonates throughout the community and also gives the students, parents, and teachers of Chattooga High School the sense that they are constantly proving themselves to the community.

It is largely the genesis of this racial and socio-economic dichotomy that I am exploring in this study of school desegregation in Chattooga County. My position in the community is both an asset to the study and a limitation. It is an asset because it provides me access to many persons who might otherwise refuse to speak openly on the subject of school desegregation and race relations. However, it also hinders my work within the Trion School District because of the possible belief that, as a teacher at Chattooga High School, I may present the Trion system in a negative light. I am aware of the possible distrust of these persons who are integral to the study, and I think the methods incorporated in conducting the study help to alleviate the biases I bring with me into it. The story of Chattooga County School desegregation is one of two educational communities who share both a common heritage and a common community, and yet they operate in two distinct spheres with communities of children who, though geographically intertwined, reside in very distinct worlds. The manner in which each school district dealt with, and continues to deal with, integration and racial diversity is an important chapter in the unfolding story of the impact of school desegregation in rural Georgia schools. As such, it sheds light on the story of southern school desegregation and re-segregation in the South as a whole.

APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

Data Collection

To understand fully the reactions of the white community of Chattooga County to public school desegregation, it is necessary to hear and to read the words of the white southerners who struggled with how to define themselves as white in a changing southern society. For this reason, much of the data collection in this study comes from personal interviews with residents of Chattooga County and from personal and school artifacts (e.g., school yearbooks, photographs, school newspapers, and letters of correspondence).¹ To check for internal validity, multiple sources of data have been examined.² Not only does the study include interviews from members of the white community, but also the information these informants provided has been checked against primary sources including school yearbooks, state and local government reports, census data, state school board data, minutes from Chattooga County and Trion City school board meetings, local and state newspapers, and federal, state, and local government studies and investigations. Similarly, a small number of interviews are included from members of the African American community who also were actively involved in the struggle over school

¹ For information on questioning and interview techniques, see Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003)

² Internal validity refers to “the extent to which scientific observations and measurements are authentic representations of some reality” as defined by Judith Preissle Goetz and Margaret LeCompte, *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research* (New York: Academic Press 1984) p. 210, In *The Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education*, Margaret Le Compte, Wendy Millroy, Judith Preissle, eds. (New York: Academic Press 1992).

desegregation. These interviews serve as sources for comparison with the perceptions and memories of the informants in the white community.

After gathering some data from the local newspaper and the school board minutes, this study of school desegregation starts with interviews of some of the major players in the school desegregation movement of Chattooga County. Chief among these persons is the former superintendent of the Chattooga County Schools, Mr. James Spence. Although Mr. Spence's advanced age served as a barrier to uncovering many of his memories of the events of desegregation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, his recollections provide great insight into the unfolding story. Another invaluable source of information and insight has been Mr. Bill Kinzy who served as both assistant principal of Chattooga High School in the late 1960s, when the county schools first desegregated, and as superintendent of the Trion City Schools in the 1980s when the system made the decision to accept all county schoolchildren who paid tuition to attend. The interviews with these gentlemen, as with other informants in the study, are semi-structured, based on an interview schedule that focused on the discovery of both the events that transpired in Chattooga County in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the motivations for these events and decisions. A major source of information and preparation for these interviews has been the minutes from the school board meetings of both Trion City Schools and Chattooga County Schools. The events and the language hidden in these documents are central to uncovering the role of race and racial identity in the reactions of the white community to the desegregation of schools in Chattooga County.

After interviews with some of the more influential players in the struggle over desegregation, the attention of the study has turned toward white residents of Chattooga County who attended school in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These informants include both members

of the more powerful white families of Chattooga County, as well as members of less economically and socially powerful families in the county. Included in this group are those who attended Chattooga High School and remained in the school system as well as those who left the county school system themselves, or who later sent their own children, to attend Trion City Schools. All interviews have lasted approximately two hours and have been recorded on tape. Following each interview, the tapes have been transcribed and coded, looking for common themes. One of the themes examined has been whether any differences exist in the attitudes of more powerful whites and those of poor whites regarding race, desegregation, and memories of schooling in Chattooga County both before and after integration. Interviews with persons from different socioeconomic groups have provided insight into both the role of whiteness in the struggle over desegregation as well as the question of the interrelationship of class and race as revealed in this struggle.

Much of the work done to uncover information on the role of economically and politically powerful whites in the protection of white racial identity in segregated schooling focuses on events and people involved in the establishment of Trion City Schools as a public school alternative to the Chattooga County Schools. Although the stated reason for this tuition-based educational alternative was to maintain the existence of a small school system with a doubtful future, the reasons for withdrawing children from the county schools to attend this smaller school system reveal a combination of racial and social motives. Uncovering the motives of parents, students, teachers, and administrators in the establishment of the Trion schools as an educational alternative has involved extensive interviews as well as examinations of artifacts from the Trion schools including school yearbooks, newspapers, and local newspaper coverage of the schools in Trion.

Another source of information on the role of wealthy and powerful whites in the effort to maintain segregated schooling in the rural South is *The Citizen*, the publication of the Citizens Council, the South's most avid supporters of the segregation academy movement. In addition, the rhetoric on private schooling in the speeches of Governors Talmadge, Vandiver, Sanders, and Maddox offer invaluable insight into the larger picture of the role of powerful whites in the fight against school desegregation in rural Georgia.

Additional sources of information on the events surrounding desegregation of schools in Chattooga County are the local and statewide newspapers that covered events in the county. These papers include the *Summerville News*, *Atlanta Journal*, and the *Atlanta Constitution*. The newspapers serve not only as tools for uncovering details surrounding events unfolding in Chattooga County's desegregation story, but also a lens through which to see the language and rhetoric captured in interviews with Chattooga County residents about events in their county. Within the metropolitan newspapers, my searches focused on dates of known school-related events in the state and nation in general. The local paper served as a window into the events in the county and into the public perceptions of these events. Often, the most interesting aspect of this local source of information was its silence on school desegregation. Although this silence on these seemingly important events is a significant comment on the social and racial situation in Chattooga County, an analysis of the *Summerville News*, its photographs, stories, advertisements, and the events it chose to cover provides invaluable insight into the social fabric of this rural community.

A final data source on the role of whiteness in the struggle over school desegregation is federal, state, and local government documents. A number of federal government documents about the status of desegregation in Georgia's schools offer insight into the opinions of various

groups of southerners toward desegregation efforts. Although many of these documents supply much needed statistical data,³ others, including U.S. Senate and House hearings, provide actual opinions of white southerners on the question of desegregation. One of the most helpful of these is the transcript of a 1968 Senate hearing examining the freedom of choice desegregation plan. Similar data are also available on a state level in the testimony heard before Georgia's Sibley Commission. This commission listened to both white and African Americans in every Congressional district in Georgia to examine Georgians' opinions on whether to maintain open public schools in the face of court-ordered desegregation. The transcripts of this testimony, including the opinions of citizens of Northwest Georgia help provide rich material about rural white Georgians' thoughts on race, education, and racial identity.

A number of court cases also illustrate the gradual tightening of the Federal Government's control over the desegregation efforts in rural Georgia in general, and Chattooga County in particular. Discussed earlier in the review of literature, one of the earliest and most significant cases to successfully question the fiction of separate but equal was that of *Sweatt v. Painter*. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that the state of Texas must allow black law students to attend the all white Texas Law School because the segregated law school established for African American students provided a less than equal legal education. Following the *Sweatt* case, the 1950 decision in *McLauren v. Board of Regents* found that the segregation of a black law student within an otherwise all white law school was a denial of equality before the law. In addition to the information gleaned from these background cases, the study also examines the original *Brown* decision as well as *Brown, II* which said that desegregation should proceed with

³ For Example, see the Southern Education Reporting Service's state by state statistical summary of segregation and desegregation from 1954-1960.

“all deliberate speed.” In spite of this somewhat vague ruling, serious integration plans were not developed in most rural southern school systems until the 1968 ruling in *Green v. County School Board* that stated that all systems should devise a plan “that promises realistically to work now.” The transcripts and final decisions in these cases are important to the study of school desegregation in Chattooga County because of their impacts on the lives of schoolchildren in this rural community. As a result of the decisions in these cases, many southern whites felt besieged by outside forces and, therefore, began to create their own defensive strategy, or massive resistance. Examinations of these earthshaking decisions help explain the responses of rural southern whites to the steady drumbeat of desegregation policy within their communities.

In addition to cases with national implications, one group of decisions rendered in Georgia courts has special significance because of the failure of one white judge in Savannah, Georgia to uphold the Supreme Court ruling on the integration of Savannah and Chatham County Schools. The trials and appeals, under the heading *Stell v. Chatham County*, 1963-1971, provide insight into the issues surrounding school desegregation and white racial identity because the presiding judge’s rulings consistently reflected the position of white supremacists throughout the state. Finally, the case of *Holmes v. Danner*, in which the University of Georgia campus was ordered to desegregate, helps to shed light on the events surrounding desegregation in Georgia’s public schools. The decisions in these trials, along with the public’s reactions to these decisions, help set the stage for an inevitable change in schooling and race relations in rural Georgia as a whole, and in Chattooga County in particular.

Data Analysis

Because this is a case study, it is important not to make claims that the findings on white racial identity in this single rural Appalachian Georgia county are applicable to white

communities in rural counties throughout the South. However, what this case does provide is a unique in-depth discussion of one rural southern community's experiences of white racial identity as expressed in the struggle over school desegregation. As such, its findings are valuable as a source of comparison and contrast to researchers who want to expand on these results by examining various rural Appalachian communities throughout the Southeast as a source of comparison and contrast. In addition, the findings are useful to school policy makers in similar rural school districts who are looking at ways to analyze their own individual situations of school re-segregation. As Walker explains, "It is the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply?"⁴

To ease this decision for policy makers and historical researchers alike, however, certain strategies were used to report the data in this study. Most importantly, the study provides rich descriptions of the settings, people, and events included in the case. This allows readers to better determine "how closely their situations match the research situation."⁵ In addition, the fact that the community studied is typical of other rural southern Appalachian counties makes the results more transferable. For this reason, the study provides detailed descriptions of the demographic, social, and economic situations of this county so that other researchers and policy makers can more easily make comparisons between their own situations and Chattooga County. With these safeguards in place, the findings from this single historical case study should be of value to historical researchers and educational policy makers alike.

⁴ R. Walker, "The conduct of Educational Case Studies: Ethics, Theory and Procedures," In W.B. Dockerell and D. Hamilton, eds. *Rethinking Educational Research* (London: Hodder & Stoughton 1980), p. 34.

⁵ Merriam, pp. 211-212.